

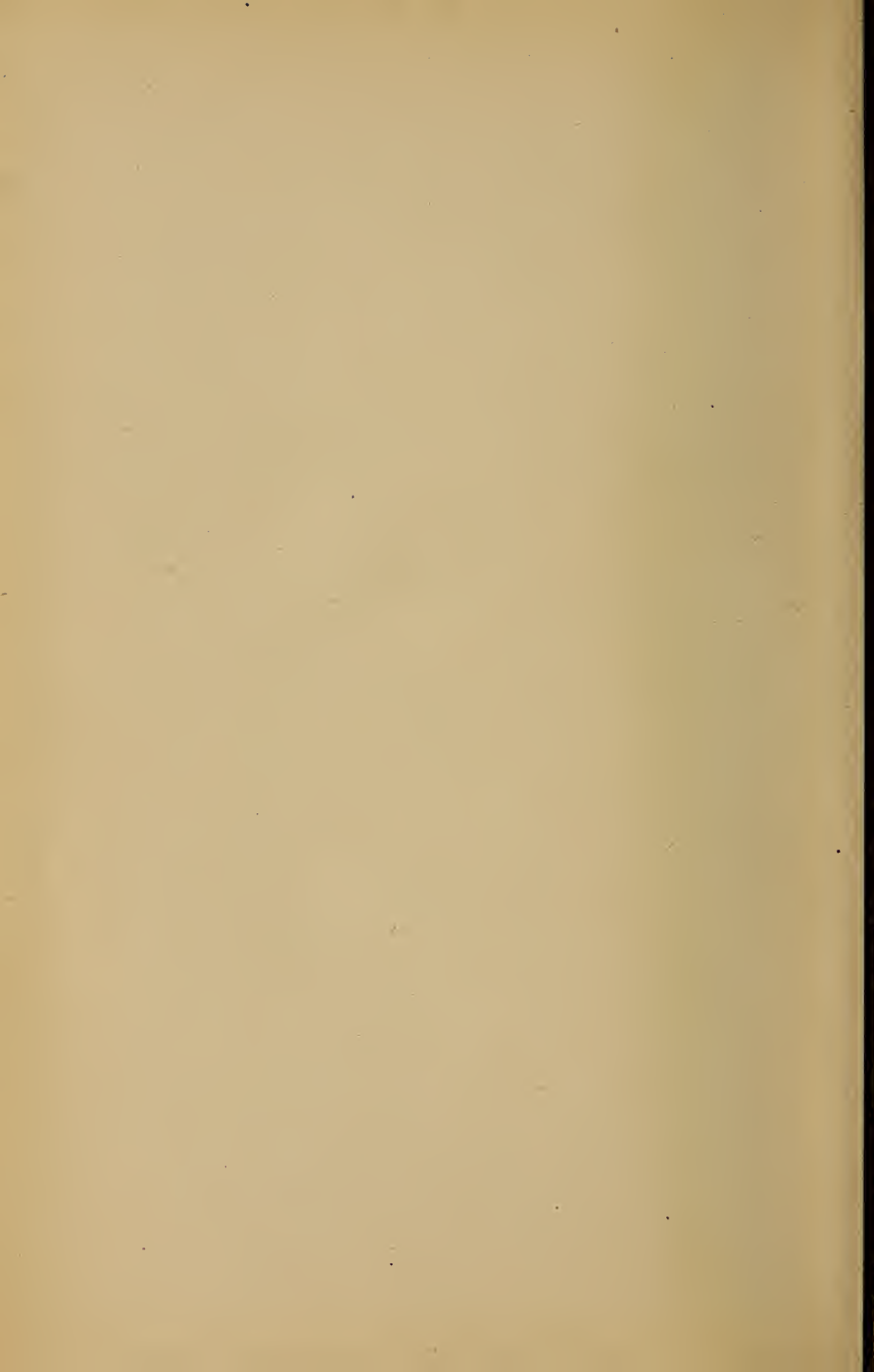
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THE KEYS OF SECT;

OR, THE

CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

COMPARED WITH THE •

SECTS OF MODERN CHRISTENDOM.

✓ BY

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1750a
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SCIENCE OF WEALTH."

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PREFACE.

FEW words are needful to be said, in introducing the following work to the public. It embodies in this small compass the mature results of the thinking of a large portion of my life. It is but just to myself to say, that the subject was never chosen with any deliberate purpose, to be investigated as the theme of a book. I have not studied it because I wished to write a book, but I have written a book, because this subject seemed forced upon my attention by the irresistible providence of God, in connection with my appointed work as a Christian minister and an educator ; and because the results to which my mind has been brought by these lessons of experience seem to me worthy of the very serious consideration of the Christian public.

I am not unaware of the boldness, perhaps some would think it more appropriate to say the temerity, of some of the positions which I have felt constrained to defend in this treatise, — constrained, not by any considerations of mere expediency, but by a profound conviction of their truth and importance. I entreat the reader to bear in mind that, as in the diseases of the body, so in those of society, it is sometimes necessary to apply heroic remedies, and courageously to resort to the knife of the surgeon. I regard that social disease against which the argument of this book is directed as being undoubtedly of this character. It seems to me, all intelligent, devout men must agree with me in saying, that that sectarian constitution of the Church which, in these pages, I have sought to lay bare to the view of all Chris-

tians, is presenting itself at the present time in many shocking and alarming aspects, and we should not shrink from the application of any remedies which may be suggested by the devout study of the Word of God. The subject is weighty and important enough to enlist the prayerful and candid consideration of every Christian scholar and thinker. The appeal is not at all to any of the sectarian passions and prejudices of the hour, but to the Word of God only.

There are men in many of those religious bodies that now divide Christendom, who are thoroughly convinced that the sect system which is now so prevalent, is contradictory to the spirit of Christianity, and who are looking and praying for deliverance from this bondage. My appeal is to them, in whatever sect found. I may not have solved the problem; but I entertain a cheerful hope that I shall not be found to have failed in quickening thought on this momentous subject, and in making some suggestions which will lead other minds along, a few steps at least, towards the desired solution. It is this hope that has encouraged me to offer this work to the public, in the midst of many misgivings and some sickness at heart. Consistently with my sense of duty I cannot do otherwise.

My final appeal is to Jesus Christ our Lord, who founded the Church, and gave assurance that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. If this book sets forth a true conception of that moral kingdom which He came to found, it will be acceptable to Him, and He will secure for it its proper influence in the great conflicts of the present and the future. My humble effort will not lose its reward.

J. M. S.

JACKSONVILLE, ILL., Nov. 1, 1879.

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THE KEYS OF SECT.

PART I.

THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUESTION STATED.

IT will be conceded by all persons who have reflected sufficiently on the subject to form an opinion, that Jesus of Nazareth is represented in our gospels to have proposed to found a peculiar and perpetual society, which he sometimes called the church,¹ but more commonly the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven;² and that he claimed that it was predicted in ancient prophecy that the Messiah should found such a society, insomuch that the assertion "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" was understood in the language of the time to mean that the Messiah was about to appear.

There is an equally universal agreement that the unique society now bearing the name of the Christian Church did originate in Palestine, almost synchronously

¹ Matt. xvi: 18, 19.

² The identity of the "church" and the "kingdom of heaven" is here assumed. For proof of this, the reader is referred to Part I., chap. iv.

with the crucifixion and alleged resurrection of Jesus, and that it was founded by men who represented themselves as his emissaries or apostles, acting in his name and by his authority. This will be conceded alike by Christians of all shades of opinion, and by unbelievers who reject the moral authority both of the church and of its founder. It will also be conceded by all Christians, that the church owes its whole moral authority to that same Jesus who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, whom his disciples represented to have risen from the dead, and that no doctrines or institutions of the church can have any claim to the moral allegiance of mankind, which cannot be shown to have originated in his teachings.

But questions of great gravity require our attention. What was the constitution of the church which Jesus founded? With what powers did he invest it? Or still more fundamentally, on what forces did he rely for its government, its enlargement, its perpetuity? In relation to such questions as these, Christian people are by no means united. Conceptions are widely prevalent and have existed for ages, which are exceedingly diverse and contradictory to each other. They exist not only in the thoughts of men, and as matter of opinion, but in corresponding forms of organization and government, some of them indeed of comparatively recent origin, others that have come down to us from antiquity. That church which claims to represent the kingdom of heaven which Jesus founded is not one but many, each with its own distinct constitution, government and laws, and each standing in presence of every other in sharp and conscious rivalry, seeking to extend its jurisdiction over the greatest possible number of subjects. Yet the Christian church is an exceedingly important element of the social life of every nation in

christendom, and all Christian men trace the origin of that church which they recognize as truly representing the society which Jesus founded, to his crucifixion and resurrection. In no other respect does modern christendom present such an aspect of confusion and anarchy as in this. On no one subject is opinion so various and contradictory, as in respect to the place which the church should occupy in the adjustment of social forces, the powers with which it is invested, and the constitution under which these powers are to be exerted. Must these conflicts be perpetual? Must christendom forever present this aspect of confusion and self-contradiction? Must a large portion of its energies still be expended in these mutual rivalries, which might otherwise be employed in co-operative effort for the benefit of mankind? Must Christian nations which ought to be united in the bonds of a religious brotherhood, be separated from each other still, by sharp antipathies growing out of contradictory systems of church government? Can the conception of Jesus never be understood, and applied to the constitution of the whole church of God?

As we stand in the presence of these solemn questions, there are many who are ready to answer without a moment's hesitation, that this conflict of opinion is so wide-spread and complicated, and so intimately interwoven with the life of Christianity in all its ages, that any remedy of this state of things is quite hopeless; that it evidently results from some deep and permanent relation of Christianity, and indeed of all religion, to human nature itself, which renders it inevitable; that in this respect what is and has been must still be in all the future. Many persons are so entirely sure that this view of the subject is sound and true, that they regard the manifestation of a disposition to

treat this state of things as though it were an evil capable of being remedied, as the sure indication of a mind unsound and incapable of forming a sober judgment on this or on any other subject. If they are believers in Christianity as a religion of supernatural origin, their theory of the case is that whatever of evil there is in this conflict of opinion is offset by many beneficial influences, and is at all events incurable; and that our wisdom is to accept the present order of things as the best condition of christendom which, human nature remaining as it is, is attainable, and mitigate the evils which proceed from it as much as we can by mutual forbearance and charity. If they are unbelievers, they are entirely confident that this conflict of opinion and organization is a fatal objection to Christianity itself, and must at no distant day bring it into general neglect and contempt.

This view of the matter, whether as held by the believer or unbeliever, seems to me rash, hasty and superficial. There may be apparent wisdom in asserting that if Jesus' conception of the kingdom of heaven, after the lapse of more than eighteen centuries, is not yet understood by his followers, there is no hope that it ever will be. But it is only apparent, not real. Such an assertion leaves out of the account the fundamental fact in the case. If God has sent to this world such a messenger as Jesus claimed to be, our short-sighted philosophy is quite inadequate to determine, how many ages must elapse, before the world will be prepared fully to appreciate either the messenger or the message. What John says of the *λόγος* has been eminently verified in respect to Jesus. "The light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."¹ The

¹ John i: 5.

world has always been slow to appreciate its greatest minds. Their grand conceptions and penetrating insight have almost always surpassed the mental capacity of their contemporaries, and their great reputation has been for the most part posthumous.

Of no one that ever lived among men was this so eminently true as of Jesus. This must necessarily have been so. The age of Julius Cæsar and Augustus could not appreciate the blessedness of meekness. An age only accustomed to the iron rule of Rome could not appreciate a kingdom ruled by moral forces. Such a social and moral system as he conceived of and proposed to establish in the world can be appreciated only in proportion as it becomes an actual reality. For example, it would be easy to show that in the time of the prophet Daniel, there was no language in which the Messianic kingdom could be foretold, otherwise than by symbols derived from the previous history of the world and its then existing condition, and that such symbols could only express it very inadequately. Nobody in that age could have formed, certainly no one could have expressed, that conception of it which we have in the present age. For the same reason the disciples had great difficulty in understanding Jesus, when he spoke as plainly as was then possible, of the future of his kingdom. If the disciples themselves, with all the advantage of personal intercourse with him which they enjoyed, experienced this difficulty, how much more must other men in that age have failed to understand him. If this impossibility of full appreciation existed in Jewish minds, trained for generations and ages under the influence of the prophets that foretold his coming, how much greater the difficulty must have been in the other nations, that had been subjected to no such discipline. Yet let it be borne in mind

that, in the lifetime of the apostles, Christianity was propagated from Jerusalem to Rome, and over all the region between. In a little more than two centuries from the death of the last of the apostles, its triumph was complete over all the Roman Empire. Nothing can be more manifest than that the immense masses who, in the progress of that mighty revolution, renounced paganism and embraced Christianity, could have had but a very imperfect appreciation of Jesus' conception of the kingdom of heaven. That all these millions should have become able to comprehend a system so refined and spiritual would have been as miraculous as the raising of Lazarus, or the resurrection of Jesus. Miracles indeed, when wrought, may impress men with a sense of divine presence and majesty, and that is what they are designed to do; but they have no power at all to work such mighty intellectual and moral changes in the minds of men. These can be produced only by experience, and teaching Providence. It was not in omnipotence to have qualified the men of those ages to appreciate Jesus' conception of the Messianic kingdom.

It is therefore not only credible, that the men who composed the church in the first three centuries might not have understood Jesus' conception, but capable of demonstration that they could not have understood it. From the very nature of the case, it is certain that, in constructing the church as an organism, they were likely to be guided, not by a clear understanding of the thought of the founder, but by ideas with which they had been familiar from childhood, and had inherited from immemorial ages of paganism. Nothing then is more absurd and preposterous than to expect to find, in the centuries immediately succeeding the apostolic age, a full and complete embodiment of Jesus'

conception of the kingdom. It is to look for it where we might know it could not have existed. The apostles themselves had come at last with immense difficulty to understand the Master. It was therefore to be presumed, that the churches planted under their immediate superintendence would at the outset be conformable to the model; but it was to be expected that, as soon as the apostles were gone, organic changes would gradually occur, and that the churches would more and more conform to ideas which were of Roman and not of Christian origin. The best that could be hoped for was, that the influence of Jesus the crucified and risen Christ, would gain a foothold in all the regions over which the church extended, and gradually exert its reforming power; and that, after how many ages of providential teaching none can tell, a time would come, when the divine conception of the kingdom of heaven could be appreciated by the whole multitude of the disciples. It is therefore no cause of wonder, no valid objection against Christianity, no ground of discouragement in respect to the future, that the thought of Jesus has been imperfectly understood for eighteen centuries, and that the practical attempts to embody it in organization which exist in this age present a strange scene of disorder and contradiction. Jesus of Nazareth is not yet appreciated.

There are many indications that there existed in the minds of Jesus and his apostles a sorrowful apprehension, that such a departure from the divine conception was soon to occur. Jesus himself distinctly predicted it.¹ It is evident that Paul wrote his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians under a painful foreboding that such an event was near at hand.² It is not my purpose to

¹ Matt. xxiv: 10-12, 24.

² 2 Thes. ii: 1-12.

enter on any interpretation of the language and imagery which he employs. It is not necessary to the purpose I have in view to do so. It is evident upon the very face of the passage in question, that he meant to express a grave apprehension of a great falling away from Christ, as soon about to happen. He even declares that the beginnings of it were already apparent. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work." He writes as if discerning the present workings of those tendencies to evil which have been pointed out in the previous paragraphs as existing in that age, and the prospect cast a shade of gloom over his usually joyous spirit. He alludes with more or less distinctness to the same subject in other epistles. Similar apprehensions are indicated by John in his first epistle.¹ The same shadow falls deeply on the whole vision at Patmos.

It is evident then, that this whole field of inquiry presents but a single question which is really worthy of any serious consideration. *Is it possible to obtain any clear, definite and certain understanding of Jesus' conception of the kingdom of heaven?* If not, all our investigations will be vain and profitless. There is but one element of order which can be cast, like a nucleus of crystallization, into this fermenting mass of conflicting thought and opinion. That element is such a definition of the original thought of Jesus, according to which the church was founded, as can be understood by any inquiring mind, and substantiated by valid argument. If such a definition can be clearly evolved and soundly vindicated from the apostolic records of Jesus, it will sooner or later meet the universal acceptance of all his followers. It would by no means be a thing to be expected that such an acceptance of it

¹ 1 John ii: 18, 19.

would be ready and immediate. Experience does not justify us in expecting, that in this world any great social and moral reforms can be so easily accomplished. Neither economic nor political truth is ever received as soon as it is propounded. It is almost invariably at first resisted, and is only received and incorporated into the laws and organizations of the world after long conflict, often extending through successive generations. But received it will be, if it is truth, however long the conflict.

In the present instance it must be borne in mind, that those forms of religious organization which are most widely prevalent in christendom, are the very forms which grew up in the first six centuries succeeding the apostolic age, and that their adherents assume, with no small degree of confidence, that the very fact that they can trace back their history to that early time is itself a convincing proof of their right to exercise authority over all the Lord's people. They are rooted deeply in the venerable usages of many ages, and cannot be expected therefore readily to yield to any argument which calls in question their fundamental principles. Other forms of organization now exist which are of much more recent origin, but they have for the most part been developed by various causes from the historic churches of the middle and earlier ages. It is therefore difficult for us to assure ourselves that, in separating themselves from those churches, they have not brought along with them organic principles of great importance, which did not originate in the thought of the Founder. It is not to be expected that the conception of Jesus can be clearly evolved, and applied to all forms of organization now existing in christendom, without calling in question organic principles widely prevalent, and received with undoubt-

ing faith by men of nearly every creed, and perhaps accepting nearly every form of church order. If any one therefore flatters himself, that a clear and defensible exhibition of Jesus' conception of the kingdom of heaven would meet with a ready and unresisted reception from the whole body of the faithful, he is certainly greatly mistaken. I certainly have undertaken the work I have in hand with no such chimerical expectations.

But there are minds that are prepared to receive such an exhibition of the subject, — prepared I would hope to welcome any devout and earnest attempt to make such an exhibition, — men who will lay hold of any truth which may be evolved by such a discussion, with such firmness of grasp as will insure its proper influence on the church of the future. Those men, whether believers or unbelievers, who think that the struggles of Christianity during these eighteen centuries have been profitless, are certainly deceived. The world is not so dark as it was when the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands. The kingdom of heaven, imperfectly as it has been understood, has been all along a light in the world, shining from age to age more and more brightly. It is possible now to understand the Messianic kingdom both morally and organically, as it was not when it began its career in the world. The apostles had great difficulty in understanding how it was possible that Jesus could be the Messiah, and yet die and leave the world, without restoring the kingdom again to Israel. From the higher stand-point which we have gained, we wonder at their blindness. Is it not possible in this age for the masses to understand a kingdom that is not of this world, — a kingdom of righteousness, governed only by moral forces?

It is plain therefore that the question before us is one and simple. What is the nature and organic con-

stitution of the kingdom of heaven which Jesus founded? It is not a question of "endless genealogies." I have not undertaken the task of tracing the pedigree of the religious organizations of the present, to ascertain which can fix its date farthest back in the centuries of darkness, conflict and gloom which succeeded the Christian era. All this is nothing and worse than nothing to the purpose. We should lose our labor, if we should prove that our favorite ideas of the church were received in the very first century after the apostolic age. Paul saw, in the apostolic age, the mystery of iniquity already working. It is highly probable from the nature of the case, that ideas widely divergent from those of Jesus the Christ gained much prevalence and acceptance within the first century after the apostles. That age could not appreciate Jesus. The only question worth a moment's thought is, — What was his conception? Our answer to this question must come from his own words and deeds. Of these his apostles were competent witnesses, only because he had qualified them to be so by his own personal teaching and by the aid of his spirit. No subsequent age is competent to appear in court at the trial of this question. If Jesus has intelligibly expressed in words, or indicated by acts his conception, we can know what it was. If he has not, the question is involved in a mystery which no investigation can penetrate.

It is not however practicable or desirable, to view this question under exactly the same aspects which it presented to those who were contemporary with Jesus. It is not a question of mere curiosity, but a practical question we are called to consider. We are surrounded by forms of thought and organization, each of which claims to be an embodiment of the original conception of the Founder. We have need therefore to consider

the question in its relations to the interpretations which have been put upon the conception of Jesus, and the forms of organization in which those interpretations are embodied. The subject must be viewed from the stand-point of the present time. If one would conduct an inquiry in relation to the supernatural origin of Christianity, in such a manner as to exert any beneficial influence on the thinking of the present age, the subject must be viewed, not alone from the stand-point of the Christian era, but also from the stand-point of the present time; not chiefly in view of the objections raised against it by scribes and Pharisees eighteen centuries ago, but especially in view of those forms of unbelief that are now prevalent. Indeed this necessity is universal. If one would enlarge the boundaries of knowledge in any department, he must prepare himself for his work by a full appreciation of the present condition of knowledge in that department. He must appreciate the labors of those who have gone before him. He must ascertain the boundaries of their knowledge, and distinctly propound the questions which remain yet to be answered. With clear insight he must take his stand on the boundary which divides the known from the unknown, and lead the way into the unexplored regions that lie beyond, guided by the light shed upon those regions from that which is already known.

This principle holds in full force in respect to the question I propose to investigate. The conflicts of eighteen centuries, in respect to the nature and constitution of the Christian church have been full of instruction. He who would assist us to a better understanding of the original conception must avail himself of all the light which has been shed on the question by the experience of all these Christian centuries. He must appreciate the present, or he cannot be its instructor. It is

only by availing ourselves of all the lessons of the past and the present, that we can have any reason to hope that we shall be able to understand the conception of Jesus more perfectly than those who have gone before us. In treating the question under consideration, we shall therefore be constantly concerned with the underlying principles of the organizations which now exist, and with those which have existed in the past ages of Christian history. On all subjects, God teaches mankind by experience, and in nothing more than in respect to religious truth. It is not too much to affirm that, consistently with the nature of the human mind, religious truth cannot be taught otherwise. The whole history of Christianity is to be regarded as one long succession of experiments, each of which had its lesson for all that were to come after. If we, in the nineteenth century, are to gain a better understanding of the divine conception than those who have gone before us have had, it must be by gathering the light of all these experiments into one bright focus, and studying the question in the full illumination thus produced. It is therefore directly relevant to the question before us to inquire what interpretations have been put upon the conception of Jesus in the past, — how it is understood in our own age, and what modes of organization have resulted from these interpretations. In view of these, the whole inquiry must be conducted. Three propositions have been tenaciously held, probably by a majority of those who, in different ages, have borne the Christian name, as undoubtedly sanctioned by the Founder of Christianity. It is not at all necessary to inquire when or how that conception of the church, to which these three propositions are fundamental, originated. It is only necessary now to say, that it certainly originated in the early Christian ages, and has certainly exerted very

great influence on the history of Christianity down to the present time. The three propositions referred to may be stated thus :—

1. That Jesus himself constituted the twelve apostles and their successors in the apostolic office, a self-perpetuating corporation empowered to govern the church universal to the end of time.

2. That baptism and the Lord's Supper are rites, the observance of which is of great importance to the spiritual welfare of all the faithful, and that these rites are so intrusted to this same perpetual corporation, that in order that any believer may receive from the observance of them the benefits they are designed to confer, they must be exhibited by a ministry deriving its powers and functions from the appointment of this corporation.

3. That the whole Christian church or kingdom of heaven, as Jesus conceived of it, was intended to present a visible organic unity under the government of this sacred apostolic corporation.

Up to the time of the Lutheran Reformation, almost all christendom had been for many centuries divided between the Latin and Greek churches, each realizing to the utmost of its power the system of which the three propositions stated above are the fundamental organic principles. Since the Reformation, church government has exhibited and does still exhibit very great variety and complication of forms ; but in them all, with perhaps very few exceptions, more or less traces of the influence of the three propositions above stated may be detected, though there are many organizations the adherents of which would earnestly reject them all, in the form in which they are stated above. Few if any of the Protestant denominations would accept either of them, yet perhaps it will be made to

appear, that comparatively few have entirely escaped from their influence.

It is therefore exceedingly obvious what course our inquiries must necessarily pursue. If the three propositions enunciated above do express the conception according to which Jesus founded that kingdom of heaven, of which the church in all Christian ages has claimed to be the living representative, then there is no room for further inquiry. Nothing in that case will remain, but that all Christian people should place themselves under the authority of that sacred corporation which Jesus himself constituted, if indeed it can be ascertained which of several claimants is in the true apostolic succession, and endeavor by means of it to promote that reformation and salvation of a sinful world which Jesus promised to secure. One inquiry therefore meets us in the very outset, and imperatively shuts off all other investigation till it is answered. Are the three propositions stated above a true expression of what Jesus meant by the kingdom of heaven? Do they rest on his authority? If they do, further discussion is useless and impertinent. If they do not, then they are of no force or validity, and the whole superstructure of church government built upon them, in whatever age or land, is without any solid foundation, and can lay no valid claim to the reverence or allegiance of any portion of the human race. Its pretended authority is a usurpation. No matter how early it originated ; no matter how long or how extensively it has prevailed ; it is of no force or validity, and is entitled to no place in our conception of the church which Jesus founded. Our first question then is, — Are these three propositions sustained by the authority of Jesus, the Christ of God?

CHAPTER II.

THE PERPETUAL THEOCRACY.

CONSIDERATIONS of great weight in determining the nature of the social state which Jesus founded seem to me to be suggested by the relations in which he stood to the prophets who had predicted his coming, and to that institution of religion, an account of which is given in the Old Testament. It is very generally assumed that the theocracy, which is the characteristic feature and the pervading idea of the Old Testament, originated with the Jewish state as instituted by Moses in the wilderness, and perished with it at the coming of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem. This is, I think, far enough from being a true account of the matter. Moses did indeed, at the command of God, establish in the wilderness that civil polity and that ceremonial of religion, under which the theocracy was to be preserved and perpetuated through many ages, and to that polity Jehovah sustained very peculiar relations. But the theocracy existed before Moses. Its fundamental law was, that every human being owes primary allegiance to God, and that no human power or authority has any right to interfere with that allegiance. In the Jewish state that law was applied alike to the priest and the people, to the ruler and the subject. It is manifest that the patriarchs, before the time of Moses, lived under such a government. If they

were devout men, it might most fitly be said of them, as of Enoch, that they "walked with God." Their individual lives were guided by such manifestations of God's will as might at any time be made to them, whether by natural or supernatural means. Over the nomadic tribes of the East, no human authority was exerted, except that of the patriarch over his own household. They were subject neither to kingly nor to priestly rule. They ascertained, as well as they were able by the lights which God afforded them, the way of righteousness, and walked in it. Theocracy, the government of God, was the only government they knew.

The case of Abraham was peculiarly strong. He was called of God to separate himself from his tribe and all his kindred, apparently for the very purpose of releasing him as much as possible from all the bonds of custom and prescription, that he might more surely obey the voice of God, train up a posterity in the way of righteousness, and become through all ages the father of the faithful. For three successive generations his descendants were trained under this directly theocratic government in the land of Canaan. To prepare them for the national destiny which awaited them, it seems to have been necessary, that for a season they should be apprenticed in Egypt, to learn the arts of civilized life from a people whose civilization was at that time probably superior to that of any other on earth. Here their history is for a considerable period lost, for the most part, from our view; but in every glimpse we get of it, the theocratic principle is strikingly manifested. Moses is called of God out of the land of Midian, to deliver the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt. He has nothing on which to rely for success in that great undertaking but the promise

of God. He has no means of persuading Pharoah to let the people go but the command of God. But he fearlessly assumes, that mighty kings as well as every individual subject owe primary allegiance to the God of heaven ; and he urges the uncompromising demand of Jehovah, till that haughty monarch yields, and he and all his people "send them out in haste."

The Israelites themselves had no reason to confide in Moses, except the evidence he gave them that God had sent him. The whole transaction was purely theocratic. Moses sustained no official relation to the people, but commanded and guided them only by the authority of God. Yet, though he led them into the great and terrible wilderness, and not directly into the land of Canaan as they probably expected, they followed wherever he led them. Sometimes they were weary of the tedious way, and were in imminent peril of perishing in the wilderness, and though they sometimes murmured and demanded to be conducted back into Egypt, yet the convincing proof that God was in very deed with Moses still prevailed, and they abode under his command in that wilderness, till their civil polity and their religious ceremonial were fully established. Then another leader whom God had raised up led them into the land of Canaan.

If now we examine this whole Mosaic institution, whether of religious ceremonial or civil polity, we shall find that, instead of setting aside that direct theocratic government which had previously existed, it confirmed and perpetuated it. I cannot, without too great a digression from the purpose I have in view, enter into a thorough investigation of the priesthood instituted by Moses. But I run no risk in making the assertion, that it differs so widely and fundamentally from any other priesthood that ever existed, as to create a strong

presumption that it originated in divine appointment. The only peculiarity however with which I am now concerned is, that it in no degree made the priest the lord of conscience. The allegiance of the individual was due directly to God, with no intervention of priestly authority. There was a prescribed ceremonial, which the priest only could perform. But the law, which prescribed that ceremonial in its minutest details, did not emanate from the priesthood, and could in no respect be changed by priestly authority. It bound the priest equally with the people. The priest had no right to affix any penalty for the violation of the law on the part of the people. Both in respect to the priest and the people, the penalty was with God alone. If there was corruption in the priestly office, God would punish it; and sometimes did punish it in an awful manner, as in the case of the corrupt sons of Eli. If the people neglected or profaned the offerings of God, or forsook the way of righteousness, God visited their iniquities upon them and their children. But the priest could neither make the law, nor inflict a penalty on those who violated it. Thus both in the legislative and executive function, the theocratic principle remained unimpaired.

The priesthood could exercise no control over the administration of the government in any department. We are told, that on the eve of the battle of Platea, the Lacedemonian army was attacked by the Persians in overwhelming numbers. The attack was a surprise. The Athenian allies were separated from the Lacedemonians, and in marching to their assistance were met by a detachment of the enemy, and unable to join their forces, or render needed aid. In these alarming circumstances, Pausanias the Spartan general, instead of repelling the attack at once with the best means at

his command, ordered a solemn sacrifice, that the will of the gods might be first ascertained by priestly inspection of the entrails of the slaughtered victims. The officiating priests pronounced the omens thus presented unpropitious. The priests were ordered to repeat the sacrifice. Meanwhile the Spartans were standing in solid phalanx without discharging an arrow, protecting themselves as best they could from the arrows of the enemy with their broad shields. While they were waiting in this manner, and many had already been wounded, and some had fallen, the omens were again and again declared by the priests to be unpropitious, and the eager soldiers were not permitted to engage in the battle, till the priests gave out that the omens promised victory.¹

As I read this narrative, the question presented to my mind is, not whether I can admire the religious reverence of the Greeks, which it strikingly exhibits, but what estimate I am to form of such a priestly power as this, capable of being used, as it surely was, to render useless the military skill of the general, however great, and the bravery of his army, however trustworthy. No people can live under such a priesthood, and be subjected to it for successive generations, without being morally degraded, and politically imperilled by it. The true question in such a crisis is, not what indications priests profess to see in the entrails of beasts slain in sacrifice, but what is the best instant use which a general can make of the resources at his command, to repel the attack and save his army and his country from destruction. We hear much in these times in certain quarters, of Jewish superstition. The Jewish priest-

¹ Wilson's *Outlines of History*, p. 693, quoted from Bulwer's *Athens*.

hood gave no opportunity for the manifestation of any such superstition as this. This is Spartan, not Jewish superstition. I think these assertions may be made in reference to the whole system of Jewish sacrifices with perfect safety.

It must be admitted however, that one function of the high-priest seems to be an exception to the principle which pervades all other parts of this ceremonial. The ruler, as well as the private citizen, owed direct allegiance to God, and the universal authority of the theocracy over him was recognized in the institution of Urim and Thummim. Great obscurity hangs about this institution, and probably the manner of its use cannot be satisfactorily ascertained from any description of it now extant. It is plain however, that it was a prescribed method by which a ruler or public personage might inquire after the will of God in relation to matters of dractical importance, through the high-priest ministering in the tabernacle in full priestly dress. It does not appear to have sustained any relation to the ordinary functions of the priesthood, nor does the high-priest himself appear to have had the power of returning such an answer as might be dictated by his own caprice, or subservient to his private ends. The answer seems to have been given in such a manner, as to be equally manifest to him who was inquiring of God, as to the high-priest through whom the inquiry was made.

I am greatly confirmed in this view of the case, by the intimate and exceedingly important relation of the prophetic function, to the whole Jewish state. This function was by no means confined to the predicting of future events, but was concerned with the manifesting of the will of God in reference to all that affected the duty or the well-being of the people, whether present

or future. The prophet was pre-eminently an instructor of the people in practical duty, and his authority was paramount to every other. The prophet must indeed furnish proof that his message was really the word of the Lord. Of that evidence, the people must judge on their own responsibility. If they followed false prophets, they would suffer the consequences. If they rejected the message of a true prophet, they would equally be held responsible. In this respect, they were exactly like the religious teachers of the present time. All is now, as in the times of the old prophets, subject to private judgment. It is true, we have ecclesiastical systems which deny the right of private judgment to the people altogether. But after all, in free countries, it rests with the people themselves whether to adhere to those systems or not, and therefore the ultimate appeal is to private judgment. So was it in respect to the prophets of Israel. Those prophets were numerous, and there were prophets of Baal as well as prophets of God. If at any time the people became corrupt, and disposed to forsake the way of righteousness, false prophets would become more numerous and more arrogant in their pretensions; and he who would obey the voice of the Lord must distinguish the true from the false, the precious from the vile. This is religious liberty, and the people of Israel pre-eminently enjoyed it.

The authority of the true prophet of God was above that of the kings. David, in the height of his power, listened with the reverence of a child to the word of the Lord at the mouth of Nathan the prophet, and at his severe and withering rebuke humbled himself, and said, "I have sinned against the Lord." Jeremiah could not be silenced from proclaiming the word of the Lord in the very court of King Zedekiah, and the solemn denun-

ciations of Elijah were a terror to the house of Ahab, and to all Israel, though apostate from God. In our ignorance of the method of inquiring of God by Urim and Thummim, it would not be fair or philosophical to conclude, that it was in utter violation of the right of private judgment which certainly pervaded all the rest of the system. It is certain that the priests were not *ex-officio* prophets. The prophets of God were just as likely to be raised up from any other as from a priestly tribe, and had just as much authority over the priests as over any other portion of the people.

The relation of the prophets to the kings is very strikingly illustrated by the narrative of the alliance between Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and Ahab king of Israel, to go to Ramoth-Gilead to fight the Syrians. Jehoshaphat wished to inquire of the Lord concerning the undertaking. Ahab had four hundred prophets of Baal at hand, ready for the emergency, and they with one consent assured the confederate kings of the divine favor on the enterprise, and of certain victory. Jehoshaphat however, not satisfied with the prophets of Baal, asked if there was not a prophet of the Lord of whom they might inquire. Ahab said there was one, but, said he, "I hate him, because he does not prophesy good but evil concerning me." Jehoshaphat insisted, and the prophet of the Lord was sent for. As Ahab had apprehended, he prophesied with great boldness in presence of both these kings and of the mocking prophets of Baal, the utter defeat of the armies of Israel, and that Ahab would be slain in battle. Ahab, in great rage, ordered him to be put in prison, and fed with bread and water till he should return in peace. Micaiah, the Lord's prophet, answered, "If thou at all return in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me." The confederate kings went to battle, following the advice of the

prophets of Baal, and Ahab was slain according to the word of the Lord.¹

The Messiah was foretold as a prophet of the Lord. Moses said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet in the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me. Unto him shall ye hearken."² I am quite ready to admit that these words are general, that they point to the prophetic function in long succession. But they also point pre-eminently to the Messiah, as the complete development and impersonation of that function. Accordingly he appeared just as all the prophets of the Lord before him had appeared, bearing his own credentials. John the Baptist did indeed bear witness of him. But John also appeared only as the prophet of the Lord, claiming audience and obedience only on the credentials which he bore with him. Neither the one nor the other waited for any official recognition. The Jewish system knew nothing of any official authority by which a prophet was to be recognized and accredited to the people. The people must judge for themselves who were the Lord's prophets. Thus Jesus warned the people with great emphasis against false prophets in his own time. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?"³ When his enemies asked him by what authority he did these things, he retorted by asking them, what they thought of John the Baptist. This reply put them to confusion, because great multitudes of them had followed John, though John furnished no other credentials, than the evidence that he was the prophet of the Lord. Jesus himself was constantly producing the same.

¹ 1 Kings xxii : 1-37.

² Deuteronomy xviii : 15.

³ Matt. vii : 15, 16.

In his whole career we are constantly confronted with this theocratic authority. He always spoke and acted "as one having authority and not as the scribes." It was with the authority of a prophet of the Lord that he preached repentance, delivered the Sermon on the Mount and all his teachings, and stood with sublime majesty before the high-priest and the Roman governor. In all this, in everything, he was the perfect development and completion of the prophetic function, as it had existed in all the ages of the theocracy. To no authority vested in human hands was he responsible, and he demanded the reverent reception of all his teachings from the great and the lowly alike in the name of the Lord. No grander exercise of the right of private judgment was ever performed than that of the twelve apostles in obeying his command, "Follow me," or of Paul in rendering implicit obedience "to the heavenly vision." In his own career, it is most characteristically true, that in respect to this fundamental principle of the theocracy he did not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfil them. It never did stand forth so sublimely before all men as in the whole earthly life of Jesus, the Christ of God. It is as certain as his words and deeds could make it, that instead of coming to abolish that theocratic principle, he came to enthrone it, and make it everlasting, to constitute it the dominant element in the civilization of all Christian ages and lands. If we know anything of his plan, we know this.

So the apostles understood this matter after his resurrection and ascension. They stood before the multitude on the day of Pentecost, seeking and exercising no other authority than that of prophets of the Lord. When, a few days after, Peter and John were brought before the Jewish council and threatened, and

"commanded not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus," their answer is one of the sublimest declarations of the principle, which can be found in the whole long history of the struggle for religious liberty. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."¹ The same principle is reasserted in every effort of the apostles and their fellow-laborers to propagate the gospel and found the church of Christ in all the world.

We may therefore be absolutely certain, that instead of so constituting his kingdom as to annul or in any way weaken this principle, he will preserve and perpetuate it, and enthrone it wherever the glad tidings of the kingdom are received. Is it then credible that he constituted the twelve apostles and their successors in the apostolic office a self-perpetuating corporation, intrusted with the government of his kingdom, even in all its minutest details, in all coming ages? The Jewish priestly function was hereditary in the male line. Let us suppose, for the better understanding of this matter, that the sons of Levi, and especially the descendants in the male line of the family of Aaron, had not only been secure by hereditary right of all the functions of the priesthood which were conferred on them by the law of Moses, but that they had also been invested with unlimited powers of legislation over the people, in all things pertaining to the worship of God and private morality, and with judicial and executive powers to punish all violations of the laws which they enacted, by depriving the disobedient of their religious rights and privileges. The theocracy would have been at an

¹ Acts iv : 19, 20.

end, and under such a system the primary allegiance of the people would have been to God only through the priesthood. Such legislation would have invested that priesthood with a spiritual despotism as absolute and crushing as ever existed on earth.

This is just such a government as Jesus would have constituted over his kingdom in all the ages, if he had committed the government of it to such a corporation. It would be unspeakably absurd to pretend that Jesus enacted any constitution according to which his kingdom was to be governed in any such manner. He is the moral legislator of the ages, but he has left no traces of any constitutional or political laws for the government of his kingdom. If it was to be governed by such a corporation, the powers of that corporation are limited by no constitution. Yet it needs no argument to show, that in order to govern such a world-wide perpetual society forever, it would be an imperative necessity, that that corporation should enact a system of political laws according to which their government should be administered.

Let us examine this point. The apostles were to appoint their own successors, according to the claim we are examining, and induct them into office. In what manner was this power of appointment and investment to be exercised? By the whole corporation acting as the great council of the whole church? Or may each individual apostle at his own discretion ordain to the apostolic office? This question must be settled, and could only be determined by the apostolic corporation acting as a legislative body. The very first thing to be done, in discharging the trust committed to them, must have been an act of political legislation. The exercise of this appointing power could not long have been left to the discretion of

individual members of the body corporate. Such an exercise of it would have soon brought the apostolic office to the level of the whole Christian brotherhood, and the apostolic corporation to an end. Many of us remember how rapidly, in the great war of the Rebellion, officers of the rank of brigadier-general were multiplied. On the supposition that each brigadier-general, on receiving his commission, had been invested with the power of creating as many more officers of the same rank as he pleased, how long would it have been before our whole army would have been composed of brigadier-generals, with no privates to be commanded? A similar result would have followed, if each member of the apostolic corporation had been invested with unlimited power of ordaining to the apostolic office whomsoever he would. For the corporation to have left matters to be conducted thus would have been to commit suicide.

There must therefore of necessity have been from the very beginning a system of organic law, enacted by the corporation itself, and authoritative over all Christian people, prescribing the rules by which the succession to the apostolic office was to be regulated, defining the sphere within which each member of the corporation should exercise his functions, and the extent of those functions, and determining to which successor of the apostles each follower of Jesus was subjected in the Lord. As the kingdom was to cover the whole world, this system of organic law must be coextensive with the prevalence of Christianity, and constantly widen its area with each new conquest of the kingdom of God. It must be a system of political legislation as wide as the moral and spiritual reign of the Messiah on earth. As new exigencies should arise, there would be a felt necessity or propriety of carrying this legislation more and more into the details of forms and modes

of worship and the moralities of private life, and placing in the hands of those officials, by whom the government was administered under the authority of the corporation, more ample means of procuring the obedience of all the faithful.

It would also be found to be a necessity, that this world-wide government should have a political head, from which all the radii of administration should diverge, and reach the remotest portions of the universal kingdom. That head might be a great council, representing and acting in the name of the universal apostolic corporation. Or it might be an individual man, invested with the powers of the whole corporation, and acting in its name and by its authority, and a succession to that more than monarchical or imperial throne might be regulated by a law enacted by the sacred corporation. Either of these modes of government would be possible, but considering the tendencies of human nature in the past ages of the world, the monarchical constitution of such a vast religious empire would have been much more likely to be adopted, and in all probability much better, or at least much less open to objection than the aristocratic.

I affirm then, that if Jesus did by his authority as the Christ of God constitute the twelve apostles a perpetual close corporation, intrusted with the government of his church forever, he must have intended to establish substantially such a hierarchy as the Roman Catholic Church, not only such as it is in fact, but such as it is in theory, such as it would be if the schisms that separated from it the Greek, the Armenian, the Nestorian, the Coptic and the Abyssinian churches were all healed, and all these bodies brought back into its bosom, and the great insurrection of Protestantism were effectually quelled, and the authority of the pope

submissively recognized wherever the Christian name is found. I do not mean to say, that if the founder of Christianity established such an apostolic corporation, the Roman Catholic Church must necessarily be accepted as its authorized succession and embodiment; but that substantially such a hierarchy in its fundamental organic principles is its only logical development. Such a corporation must logically develop itself not merely into a hierarchy such as Rome has actually established, but such as Hildebrand aspired to in the loftiest vaultings of his ambition, and such as Cardinal Manning conceives of, when he speaks of the church as a sovereignty wholly independent of the state, and entitled itself to judge in all questions of jurisdiction which may arise between it and the state, because it alone is invested with the attribute of infallibility.

How then does the fundamental principle of the theocracy fare under such a system as this? It is annihilated. The prophetic voice is silent. The priest both makes all ecclesiastical law, and administers and enforces it. He is the sole guardian and dispenser of all religious rights and privileges. There can be no choice here between the true and the false prophet. There is nothing for the people under such a system but implicit, uncomplaining and unthinking submission to priestly authority. When such a system is firmly established, what can a prophet of the Lord do, unless he speaks the words of the priestly power that governs everything? There can be no prophet of the Lord but the regularly constituted priest, and no word of the Lord but the priest's behest. In every part and period of the history of christendom, just in proportion as the theory of the apostolic corporation for the government of the church has been adopted and practically applied, the right of private judgment has been denied and

trampled out. This is a logical necessity verified by the experience of twelve hundred years. Those passionate struggles of the weak old man who lately ruled the universal Roman Catholic world, under the pretence of being the successor of Peter, the primate of the apostles, to extinguish the right of private judgment as one of the damnable heresies of the nineteenth century, were but logical developments of the assumption, that the apostles were erected into a perpetual close corporation, with power to govern the church in all ages.

We may be assured, that if the Messiah himself were to come again to such a people in a simple prophetic character, no matter what his credentials might be, he would be silenced by the voice of an authority which would not tolerate him for a moment. Jesus himself got a hearing in the world, only because Judaism knew no such authority over conscience and private judgment. The leaders of the people at Jerusalem tried to silence both him and the apostles by authority. But it was a usurped authority unknown to the Jewish system, and the people paid little regard to it. Jesus gained a hearing in the city where he was brought up from childhood, to announce himself as the Messiah in the Jewish synagogue, where doubtless he and his parents habitually resorted on the Sabbath to worship God.¹ It was his custom from Sabbath to Sabbath to preach to the people in the synagogues of Galilee. The ideas that had come down to them from their ancestors led them to expect religious instruction, not from the priesthood alone, but from any one whom the Lord might qualify to speak for the edification of the people. It is often assumed, that the long discipline

¹ Luke iv : 15-30.

of the Jewish people under patriarchs and prophets had utterly failed of any beneficent result in the formation of the national character. No assumption could be further from the truth. Not only had a people been prepared by this process for the reception of the Messiah, but by the same process the highway of the Lord had been prepared over most of the then known world. The Jews were even then a very widely dispersed people, and wherever they dwelt in any considerable numbers, they carried their religion with them, and the synagogue was found. In these synagogues, the missionaries of the risen Christ found their first audiences and preached their first sermons, in nearly every city which they visited. Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus were the first missionaries that carried the gospel to Antioch in Pisidia. Doubtless according to their usual custom, immediately after their arrival they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and sat down. After the law and the prophets had been read, the rulers of the synagogue sent to the strange brethren present, saying, "Men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation unto the people, say on."¹ Paul arose and preached unto them Jesus the crucified Christ, whom God raised from the dead. Many of the Jews and proselytes believed, and the Gentiles who were present besought that these words might be spoken unto them the next Sabbath. On that day, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.² This enlarged liberty of utterance had come down to them from their ancestors, and their training under the theocracy. Congregations of men thus trained to religious liberty were found in every city of the empire, and were the connecting link along which

¹ Acts xiii: 15.

² Acts xiii: 14-48.

Christian truth found its way to the Gentile world. Verily, there is a God in history.

The question we have here to decide is, whether it can be easily believed that in constituting his universal kingdom, Jesus crushed out this individual religious freedom, which had been cherished under the theocracy from the days of Moses and even of Abraham, and established in its stead such a hierarchy as must, we have seen, have inevitably resulted from the government of such a perpetual corporation as we are considering. If one will candidly weigh the matters presented in this chapter, he will, I think, admit that, whatever Jesus might be disposed to abolish or modify in the Mosaic system, this theocratic element would be retained and rendered universal and perpetual. He will acknowledge that nothing else is so antecedently improbable, as his establishing or favoring such a hierarchy as, it has been shown, must have resulted from a perpetual corporation empowered to govern the whole church of God.

The obvious truth of the case is, that in no respect are the writings of the Old and the New Testaments more gloriously in harmony, and more characteristically distinguished from all the other literatures of the world, than in this one principle of the primary allegiance of every human soul to God. That principle absolutely pervades all these books, though separated from each other in the times at which they were written by a period of not less than two thousand years. Wherever in the world Christianity has had free course, it has always carried this principle with it, and made it a dominant force in society. It is in virtue of this principle, that Christianity has become the recognized religion of freedom in all history; and wherever its influence has been modified and weakened by substituting

hierarchy for theocracy, there it has become the religion of absolute despotism and not of freedom. I must therefore believe, that Jesus intended to give universal prevalence and power to that theocracy by which the Jewish people and the world were trained for his reception, and by which, in the fulness of time, he was ushered in ; and for the same reason, I must reject the doctrine of a perpetual apostolic corporation as utterly subversive of that theocracy.

CHAPTER III.

THE PERPETUAL PASSOVER.

THAT conception of the kingdom of heaven which, as has been admitted, has received the sanction of a large majority of all those who in different ages have borne the Christian name, not only accepts the doctrine of the perpetual apostolic corporation, but assumes that the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper are in such a sense intrusted to the keeping of that same corporation, that no believer can receive from the observance of them the benefits they are designed to confer, unless they are exhibited by a ministry deriving its powers and functions from the appointment of that same corporation. For these reasons, these two rites have come to occupy a very conspicuous place in the government of the church in all the past ages of its history. In prosecuting the work I have undertaken, it will therefore be necessary to inquire in what relations to this kingdom Jesus really placed these rites. It is my design in this chapter to prosecute this inquiry in respect to the Lord's Supper. It seems to me that the relation in which Jesus stood to the theocracy sheds much light on this question, as well as on the question discussed in the previous chapter.

It is by no means intended to imply in the heading of this chapter, that there is an absolute identity in all respects of the Lord's Supper as instituted by Jesus,

and the Passover as instituted by Moses. I do not know that our Lord himself ever called the rite which he instituted the Passover. But there are points of intimate relationship and close resemblance between the two which are certainly very striking, and, it seems to me, very instructive.

1. The occasion on which the new Christian rite was instituted is very remarkable. Probably it was our Lord's custom from childhood annually to observe the Passover in its appointed season; but we have no account of his observing it on any other occasion than this, or of his observing it at any other time with his disciples as constituting a family. But the crucifixion was just at hand, and he sent two of his disciples to procure a room and make preparation for his eating the Passover with his disciples before he should suffer. On the appointed evening, they all sat down together at the feast of the Passover. In the midst of that feast, he made use of the unleavened bread which was on the table, and the wine which had been prepared for the evening entertainment, to institute a new rite, which was to be observed wherever the gospel of the kingdom should be preached. The appearance certainly is that he intended that this new rite should take the place of the old, and sustain the same relation to the Messianic kingdom, which the Passover had sustained to the institution of religion established by Moses. In this observance of the Passover in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, the ancient rite was not abolished, but divested of its national character, and made universal and perpetual. The feast began with the Passover and ended with the Lord's Supper.

2. The design of the two observances was strikingly similar. The Jewish Passover was intended as a perpetual monument of the great event in the history of the

founding of that nation and that peculiar institution of religion which, as was shown in a previous chapter, preserved and perpetuated the theocratic principle through many dark and stormy ages, much as the tables of the law were preserved in the sacred ark of the covenant from being lost or corrupted in times of ignorance and barbarism. Just as the whole use of the ark consisted in preserving and transmitting the tables of the law, the whole value of the Mosaic institution of religion lay in transmitting the theocratic principle down to the time when the Messiah should appear, and training under its influence a people to receive the Messiah and communicate his better revelation of God to the rest of the world. In all subsequent ages of Jewish history, by this annual commemoration, the Jew was reminded of that great deliverance from which his nation dated its origin, and his faith in the God of Israel was revived and strengthened. It was a monument of the event it commemorated more enduring than bronze, and powerfully tended to keep alive the worship of Israel's God. If religion declined at any time, and the worship of God was neglected, this observance fell into disuse. In times of repentance and national reformation of worship and morals, the Passover was revived and celebrated with great solemnity and enthusiasm.¹ Thus fidelity in this observance was both a means of preserving their faith and worship in purity, and the consequence and fit expression of national repentance, after seasons of religious declension and apostasy.

The design of the Lord's Supper had an exactly similar relation to the great event in the founding of Christianity,—the crucifixion of its Founder. In the act of instituting the Supper Jesus said, "This do in remem-

¹ 2 Kings xxiii: 21-23. 2 Chron. xxx: 15. Ezra vi: 20.

brance of me." As the Passover was a perpetual monument of the deliverance of Israel from the plague that destroyed in one night all the first-born of the Egyptians, and from grievous bondage in Egypt, so the Supper was intended as a perpetual monument of the deliverance of all believers in the crucified Christ, from the more fearful destruction and the more galling bondage of sin. As in all Christian ages and lands, that rite should be observed, faith would be strengthened and devotion intensified. If at any time there should be apostasy from the Christian faith, this observance would either be corrupted and obscured by superstition, or would fall into neglect and disuse. In times of reformation, it would be revived in the purity and simplicity of the primitive institution, and be celebrated with new fervor of devotion. This account of the design of the Passover and the Lord's Supper agrees both with the original declaration of their founders, and with their history in all subsequent ages.

3. Commemoration certainly was the leading design of the Passover, but not its only design. Another end to be answered by it is thus stated by its Founder, "That ye may know how that the Lord hath put a difference between the Eyprians and Israel."¹ It was intended that the people of Israel should be the guardians of a peculiar and sacred principle of religion, which the nations of the world were by no means prepared at that time to receive, and that they should be trained by it for a great service which they were in their subsequent history to render to all nations. For this purpose it was necessary that they should be separated from all other nations as a peculiar people. The observance of the Passover was intended to be a badge, by which they

¹ Exodus xi: 7.

would be thus distinguished as the worshippers of Jehovah, and as peculiarly enjoying his favor. It was a distinguishing mark set on that people who, because they obeyed Jehovah's voice, were protected from all harm in that terrible night in which all the first-born of Egypt perished. Every observance of it implied a promise, that, on condition of their fidelity to God, he would in like manner put a difference between them and the nations around them that did not worship God, by the blessings he would confer on them and the calamities from which he would deliver them.

In like manner the disciples of the crucified Christ were to be the perpetual representatives of that kingdom of righteousness which he founded by his mediatorial mission, and especially by his crucifixion and resurrection. They were to be distinguished by the exalted and worthy ideas which they entertained of God, by the freedom of their worship from superstition, by the purity of their morals, by their universal philanthropy, and by the blessings temporal and spiritual which they would enjoy in consequence of their adhesion to Jesus the crucified Christ. The observance of the Lord's Supper was to be a perpetual badge of distinction by which this peculiar people might be everywhere distinguished from the rest of mankind, and which all might wear who wished openly to avow their faith in him, of whatever nation, language, or kindred among men.

It is wonderful to how great an extent this observance has been in fact a distinguishing badge of the followers of the crucified Messiah. Those who reject him in his high mediatorial office have little regard for the Lord's Supper, though they may assume the Christian name. With them the observance either passes into disuse or neglect, or is retained with little faith and fervor. On the other hand, the millions who have

buried Christianity under a mass of superstition and fable have never failed to corrupt this rite with a ritual, in which scarce a trace of the original institution can be discerned. Thus the celebration of it with earnestness and fervor in its original simplicity is and ever has been very accurately distinctive of the followers of Jesus the crucified Christ. The badge is so constructed that they who are the spiritual disciples of the Master are eager to assume it, while those who are not are either indisposed to wear it, or are disgusted with its simplicity, and mar it with their own inventions. The badge retains its distinctive character by a self-regulating power. This is certainly very remarkable.

4. Another striking peculiarity must not be omitted, though I do not remember to have seen it insisted on. The Lord's Supper has a very remarkable peculiarity among commemorative observances, in the fact that it was instituted in anticipation of an event which had not yet occurred. The same is true of the Passover. When the families of Israel, throughout all the land of Egypt, assembled on that night in their dwellings, each having prepared the lamb from which for the first time the Passover was to be eaten, the destruction of the first-born of Egypt was yet future, and had been made known to the people who were to celebrate it only by the prophet of the Lord. The same was true of their own deliverance from bondage. They prepared and ate the feast in faith of what was to be. It was a prophetic, not a commemorative observance; but it was never again to be prophetic. That very night the destroying angel would visit every dwelling of the Egyptians, but the blood of the lamb on the door-post and lintel of each dwelling of the Israelites was to be the pledge that he would "pass over" them, and that no harm should befall them. The next day, while all

Egypt was in mourning, from the palace of proud Pharaoh to the humblest hovel of all his subjects, the Israelites should escape forever from the cruel bondage under which they were groaning, and every subsequent observance of the rite should be commemorative of the mighty deliverance. Thus we have the remarkable coincidence, that both the rite which commemorated the founding of the Mosaic institution of religion, and that which in like manner was to commemorate the founding of the Messianic kingdom, were instituted and once observed prophetically, and became ever afterwards memorials of a mighty deliverance actually achieved. Moses in instituting the Passover, and Jesus in instituting the Supper, acted each purely in his prophetic character, and exclusively by theocratic authority. To Moses stood opposed, in fearful array, all the pride and pomp and military prowess of the monarch of Egypt, and he had nothing wherewith to withstand him but the word of the Lord. Against Jesus was arrayed all the malignity of the leaders of the corrupted Jewish state, in league for the moment with the resistless power of Rome, and he had nothing to rely on but the authority of the unrecognized Messiah, and of that King who on the morrow was to win his crown on the cross. Each believed in God and was clearly conscious of his great mission, and instituted a rite which was to commemorate through unnumbered ages an event which had not yet occurred, but would occur on the morrow. This is a remarkable resemblance indeed. Let all the annals of history be searched for a parallel. Yet neither in the institution of the Supper, nor in anything that Jesus said of it, is there any hint that this coincidence was designed or even thought of. That is left to the insight of the reader.

5. Another resemblance must not be omitted. Any

intervention of the priestly function was unnecessary to the observance of the Passover. Its first observance antedated the priesthood, and the whole Mosaic ritual; and even after the institution of the priesthood, it was not placed in any necessary relation to the Passover. That feast was interwoven with other parts of the Jewish ritual by the subsequent legislation of Moses. It was followed by the seven days' feast of unleavened bread, in which were solemn convocations unto the Lord, and the priests killed the customary burnt offerings. The people were commanded no longer to observe the Passover at their own homes, but to congregate for the purpose at the place chosen out of all their tribes, where the Lord recorded his name. But it still did not lose its domestic character. The father, priest of his own house, was still competent to kill the lamb, "the sacrifice of the Passover." In some instances, as in Hezekiah's Passover,¹ that service was performed by the priests, but a special reason was assigned for their doing it in this case. "For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified; therefore, the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passover for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the Lord." So far then was it from being true that the killing of the passover was a priestly function, that it was deemed necessary to assign the reason why, in this case, they observed it "otherwise than it is written." Though the people assembled at Jerusalem for the observance of the feast, they still observed it by families. It is not to be supposed that the two disciples whom Jesus sent to find a "guest-chamber where he might observe the Passover with his disciples,"² were the only persons who were on that day walking the streets

¹ 2 Chron. xxx : 5-18.

² Luke xxii : 11.

of Jerusalem on a similar errand. The city must have abounded in arrangements for furnishing such accommodations.

In the institution of the Supper, there is also the absence of any recognition of a priestly function to be exercised in its observance. It even loses its sacrificial character. The old Passover pointed, like the needle to the pole, to the one great sacrifice that was to be offered. With the same index finger, the new Passover pointed backward to the same sacrifice, which had been offered by the crucified Christ of God. It was simply a feast, to be observed by the followers of Jesus in all succeeding times, in commemoration of the founding of the Messianic kingdom. It is very noticeable that, in his last observance of the Passover, Jesus departed from the domestic character of the institution. The persons who united in the observance did not constitute one household, but the incipient kingdom of heaven. This signifies that the commemorative rite was to be removed from the guardianship of the household into the open air of universal humanity. But there is no intimation that any priestly guardianship is to be substituted for that of the household. It is still to be a commemorative feast, to be observed by all the followers of Christ, wherever two or three are assembled in his name.¹

Is it then to be believed that Jesus constituted the twelve apostles, with such successors in the apostolic office as they should appoint, a perpetual corporation, and in such sense committed the guardianship of this rite to that corporation, that its benefits can only be dispensed to the people by official agents appointed by it? This is what is claimed by all those who advocate that conception of the church of which the three propo-

¹ Matt. xviii : 20.

sitions already enunciated are the fundamental organic principles. It was shown in a previous chapter, that it is highly incredible, that Jesus committed the perpetual government of the church to such a corporation. But may it not still be maintained, that, as the twelve apostles only were present at the institution of the Supper, he intended to commit the rite in trust to them and their successors forever, to be by them dispensed to the whole multitude of his followers?

It is a sufficient answer to this question, that no such intimation whatever is contained in the language employed by Jesus on the occasion. He addressed them simply as his followers, without the slightest hint that he was investing them and their successors forever with the guardianship of this rite, and the official duty of dispensing its benefits to his followers. No word is reported to have fallen from his lips, which can be tortured into such a suggestion. Nothing can be more certain than that the idea of such a guardianship over the rite never could have been derived from the account of the institution of the Supper given by either of the three evangelists who have recorded it, or from the independent account of it given by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.¹ This consideration should settle the whole question. He who claims that the Founder of Christianity committed this rite to the guardianship of a perpetual corporation, is bound to show the specific grant of power to that corporation in the words of Jesus himself. If no such grant can be shown, the claim is a hideous usurpation.

But we have much stronger proofs to allege than the mere absence of such a specific grant. To have committed the Lord's Supper to a perpetual corporation to

¹ 1 Cor. xi: 23-29.

be by them controlled and dispensed to the people would have committed to them also all those indefinite and unlimited powers for the government of the church, the inevitable consequences of which were pointed out in a previous chapter. This would be still more especially true, if the rite of baptism was in like manner committed to the same corporation. It requires no argument to show, that if Jesus commanded his followers in all ages to observe these two rites, and instituted a perpetual corporation through which alone the people could obtain the privilege of obeying this command of the crucified and risen Master, that corporation would govern the church with unlimited powers. It could magnify as much as it pleased the importance of these rites to the salvation of the individual believer, prescribe such conditions at its own discretion, by compliance with which only access was to be gained to these rites, and appoint the agents who should be empowered to admit to them and exclude from them. A more absolute government than this cannot be conceived of. Just such an absolute government did the Founder of Christianity establish, if he committed the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper to the control of a perpetual corporation.

It is true historically, beyond all contradiction, that wherever the theory of a perpetual apostolic corporation has been received in any age of the world, the body claiming to be that corporation has always exercised control over the church through the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The power of ordination is the power to induct men into such an official relation to the sacred corporation, as to qualify them to exhibit these rites to the people. The power of confirmation is the power to open the door to the Lord's Supper. Penance and absolution are priestly functions by which the

priest opens the door to the Lord's Supper to the penitent, and shuts it against the impenitent. To that same power of opening and shutting, the confessional owes all its influence and all its ghostly terrors. Yet if Jesus really constituted the perpetual apostolic corporation, and committed the Lord's Supper to it, he established and must have intended to establish such a despotism over his church in all ages.

To commit the Lord's Supper to such a corporation was to constitute in the church a perpetual priesthood with priestly powers more unlimited than any known to history. The essential idea of the priesthood is that of an order of persons intrusted with powers and functions of such a character, that no man can obtain the favor of God except through the exertion of those powers and functions. A priest is essentially a mediator between God and man, through whom alone man can approach his God and obtain his favor. The sacred apostolic corporation, if constituted by the Master with the powers which are assumed for it, was in a pre-eminent sense a priesthood. Jesus commanded all his followers, "This do in remembrance of me." But when men desire to obey that command, they find the table of the Lord in the keeping of the apostolic corporation, and every avenue to it guarded by the agents whom that corporation appoints. They learn from those agents that without the observance of those rites they cannot be saved, and yet they can observe them only by the permission and under the authority of the same perpetual corporation. The members of that corporation have thus become a universal priesthood, and are supposed to exercise unlimited powers, not only over the church of Christ, but over the eternal destiny of men. In human history, there is no other such priesthood as this. This surely is not the perpetual Pass-

over. With the Passover, no priestly power could meddle. It needed no other priest than the father, the priest of his own house. But if we are to believe the advocates of the perpetual apostolic corporation, Jesus, on that same night in which he was betrayed, converted that simple domestic feast into the most terrible instrument of priestly despotism that ever existed on earth. It is high time that the followers of Christ should with united voice disown and reject an assumption so groundless and so hideous.

The claim is indeed set up by a very high authority, that an official priesthood was recognized in the churches of the New Testament. It is not agreeable to give utterance to a criticism of any portion of a formula of worship so revered and time-honored as the Book of Common Prayer; but in discussing the subject now under consideration, I owe a sacred duty to the cause of truth and righteousness, which must be discharged wherever the censure may fall. The preface to the form of ordaining priests, bishops and deacons used in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, commences with the following words: "It is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the apostles' time there have been these orders of ministers in Christ's church, — bishops, priests and deacons."

It is, I confess, to me a matter of wonder that the many really wise and excellent men who adhere to the liturgy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States can use and publicly recite these words without blushing. "It" certainly "is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture" that none of the officers of the church named in the New Testament are ever called priests. The church of the New Testament knows and recognizes no such function in any of its

officers. There is no hint in any part of the New Testament, certainly not in any recorded saying of Jesus, that the offering of sacrifices was to constitute any part of Christian worship. This was the priestly function. The church had therefore no need of any priestly officials, and none of its public servants were ever called priests.

If to this it is replied that there are three designations of office recognized in the apostolic times, — bishops (*ἐπίσκοποι*), presbyters (*πρεσβύτεροι*), and deacons (*διάκονοι*), and that the early church simply substituted the word priest (*ιερέως*) for presbyter, I have a double reply to make to the assertion. No scholar will, in the present state of exegetical knowledge, found an argument to prove, that three orders of the ministry were recognized in the apostolic churches on the use of the words “bishop,” “presbyter,” and “deacon,” in the apostolic writings. It is evident beyond all contradiction, that the words “bishop” and “presbyter” are used in the books of the New Testament interchangeably, and therefore cannot be understood to imply two distinct orders of the ministry. That point is so well settled by the abundantly expressed judgment even of eminent Episcopal scholars, that it is quite superfluous to restate the argument. The use of these three words therefore in the apostolic writings, can afford no support whatever to the statement quoted above from the Book of Common Prayer.

Again, even if it should be conceded that these three words do indicate three orders of the ministry, there is still great impropriety in substituting the word “priest” for “presbyter,” as the name of one of those orders. It does great injustice to the New Testament. It throws back upon it a use of language unknown to it, and which originated in later times, when ideas unknown to

Jesus and his apostles were rapidly creeping into the constitution and government of the church. Christian ministers may have been called priests in very early times, it is not at all important to my purpose to inquire how early. It is entirely sufficient that the word "priest" is never so used in the apostolic writings, and while the Reformed Episcopal Church is engaged in revising the Prayer Book, it is to be hoped they will not cease from their labors till they have essentially modified the statement above quoted. This is a point of great importance. The fact that the word "priest" is never used as a designation of office in the church in any of the books of the New Testament is exceedingly significant and important. It points with unmistakable meaning to the great central truth, both of the Old and the New Testaments, that the offering up of Jesus the Christ on the cross was the end toward which all the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed, and in which they were fulfilled. When that great event had been achieved, the kingdom of God on earth had no longer any need of the priestly function. Jesus the Messiah had assumed the priestly office, and offered the one all-sufficient sacrifice. His kingly office related to the future. He was to govern the church in all ages and lands. But his priesthood from the time of the crucifixion was related to the past. He entered into the holy of holies and accomplished the priestly function once for all.

Whoever the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews may have been, it is impossible to deny the force of his argument. The sacrifices of the Mosaic system formed an important part of worship, as long as the Mosaic institution continued in force. But the whole system had its perfect accomplishment in the crucifixion of the Messiah. Jesus the Christ absorbed in himself the whole priesthood, and offered the one sacrifice for all

men. He is still our priest, our high-priest. But it is only in view of the sacrifice which has been offered, not of one that is to be offered. He makes intercession for us forever, but his intercession always looks back to Calvary. It is remarkable that the priestly office of Jesus, in the same manner as his kingly office, is to be shared by all his true followers. In the language of the vision of Patmos, he is said to have made us "kings and priests unto God and his Father."¹ "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."² Peter speaks of the followers of Christ as "an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto God," and also as a "royal priesthood." The meaning of this language is quite obvious. The kingdom of God on earth is to be governed by moral and spiritual forces. All true disciples are to be associated with Jesus Christ in wielding those forces for the reformation and salvation of men. In like manner, Jesus exercised the priestly function by offering himself a willing victim to the cause of human salvation. In this too all his true followers are to share. They are one and all to offer themselves living sacrifices unto God in the same cause of human salvation. The priesthood of his followers is one which cannot be performed by proxy. No man can be commissioned to offer this spiritual sacrifice for his brother. It is the consecration of our entire selves to God, even as Jesus consecrated himself for our salvation.

It makes no difference then, when any class of officials in the church of Christ were first called priests. It is a perversion of language whenever introduced. It is substituting a strange dialect for the speech of apostolic times, and, as always, the changed form of speech is a

¹ Rev. i: 6.

² Rev. v: 10.

sure indication of the introduction of modes of thought new and foreign, and unknown to primitive Christianity; and it is easy to see how the work of corruption was proceeding. It is assumed without any warrant whatever, that the simple rite of the Lord's Supper, instead of being a perpetual Passover, to be observed by the disciples of Christ in all their generations, without any priestly intervention, is a religious rite, committed to the exclusive guardianship of a priestly corporation, to be enjoyed by the people only as dispensed by them and their successors in office. In the hands of such a priesthood, the rite soon loses its character of a commemorative feast, and becomes a priestly sacrifice. The teaching presbyter soon becomes the mediating priest, and assumes the priestly name, and by and by, in the progress of the ages, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, with all its learning and piety, and in face of the intelligence of the nineteenth century, assumes and assures us in its revered and venerable formula of doctrine and worship, that there was an order of priests in apostolic times; and it may be thought great presumption in me to call in question the assertion. Then I must patiently bear the imputation.

Priestly assumption went on apace. It was not long till every celebration of the Supper became a new offering up of Christ in sacrifice for the communicant. The priest became empowered to convert the bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ, to create that body from the materials that were before him, and to offer it afresh for the sins of the people, and the man whom the priests debarred from participating in that sacrifice could hope for no share in the salvation of Christ. He was an outcast, accursed of God. A feeling of horror comes over us as we think of so terrible

a perversion of the simple commemorative feast which Jesus instituted on the night in which he was betrayed. Yet this very perversion with all that is shocking in it is a perfectly natural and even logical consequence of the assumption that the Lord's Supper was committed to a self-perpetuating corporation, to be dispensed to the people only by its authority.

There is then no difficulty in understanding what took place in that upper chamber at Jerusalem on the night before the crucifixion. The Passover had commemorated for ages the founding of that national institution of religion, by which the great principle of the theocracy had been conserved, and the Jewish people had been trained for the reception of the Messiah. That institution had now accomplished its work and was to give place to the Messianic kingdom. Devout men would no longer have any need to observe a national Passover, but a commemorative feast, celebrating in the same spirit the event that was about to lay the foundation of the universal kingdom of Christ, as the Passover had commemorated the deliverance of the people from Egypt and the founding of the Mosaic economy. There was need, not of a national, but of a universal and perpetual Passover. For this purpose Jesus instituted the Supper, not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them; not to abolish the theocracy, with all the religious freedom of which it had been the parent, but to denationalize it, and make it a perpetual heritage of all the faithful in Christ Jesus. That in doing this, he placed the rite under the perpetual guardianship of a self-perpetuating priesthood, with unlimited powers to make and execute laws for the government of this kingdom, is incredible, and the very suggestion of such a constitution is shocking. It is only wonderful that such an idea can ever have gained any currency in the world.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIMACY OF PETER.

I THINK it would be generally admitted by all candid persons who regard Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfilment of ancient prophecy and the accomplishment of that which was the end of the whole Mosaic system, that the modes of reasoning employed in the two previous chapters are legitimate, and that the considerations presented in them are of considerable weight in determining the nature of Christ's kingdom, and of that rite which, by the admission of all, is the central figure in Christianity as an institution.

It may however perhaps be said with some degree of force, that we must after all learn from Jesus himself what institutions he really intended to found and perpetuate, and that from his express authority there can be no appeal. From this statement of the case, I shall be the last to dissent. There are certain reported words of Jesus which seem to many explicitly to authorize and require a very different constitution of the kingdom of heaven from that which has thus far been set forth in these pages, and which therefore demand a very candid and earnest examination. The most prominent of these is the following :—

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that

thou art John the Baptist ; some Elias ; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church : and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”¹

These words seem to me to contain decisive proof of that identity of meaning of the two forms of expression here used by our Lord, “my church” and “the kingdom of heaven,” which was assumed in the first paragraph of this work. Whether we interpret them in the traditional and papal sense, or in the spiritual sense advocated in this chapter, it is alike true, that the two predictions, that Peter was to be a foundation stone of the church, and that he was to have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, were fulfilled by the same series of events. If I am right in my interpretation, Peter became, by the very same acts, the fulfilment of both predictions. By his convincing preaching on the day of Pentecost, he was constituted a foundation stone of the church, and opened the door of the kingdom of heaven.

This should, I think, be accepted as decisive evidence that in this conversation, the two modes of expression are of the same import. I do not however think it

¹ Matt. xvi : 3-19.

would be easy to show, that in all cases of their use, they are perfectly synonymous. The word "church" is sometimes used to describe the local church, the Christian synagogue: the kingdom of heaven, never.¹ But when the word "church" is applied to the church universal, it seems to be quite synonymous with "kingdom of heaven." The latter phrase is sometimes used to describe the visible society of those who profess to be Christians and wear the badges of discipleship, though it may be true that some of them are not true disciples. It is so used in the parable of the tares of the field, and still more obviously in the parable of the net cast into the sea.² Neither of these parables can be fairly interpreted except on the admission, that the kingdom of heaven means that visible society which is composed of all those who wear the visible badges of discipleship. In the same sense we ordinarily use the word "church," when we speak of the universal church as visible in this world. Both are also used to describe that invisible spiritual society which is composed only of true disciples.³ We may therefore be assured, that in assuming that these two expressions are synonymous, we incur no risk of any error which can affect our argument.

It must be noticed, that the powers and privileges here granted to the apostle Peter are all personal. It seems to me, nothing can be more conclusive and satisfactory than the comments of Dean Alford on this passage. I earnestly advise every reader who has access to that excellent commentary, to turn to this passage and read what he has said of it. His view seems to me conclu-

¹ 1 Tim. iii: 15. See Alford in Locum.

² Matt. xiii: 24-30, 36, 43, 47, 48.

³ Matt. vi: 3; also Heb. xii: 23.

sive and exhaustive. Many Protestants, if I mistake not, wish in their hearts that Jesus had never used such language as Matthew here attributes to him. They have a vague feeling, that his words strongly favor the belief, that he meant to establish such a hierarchy as the Papal Church. There is indeed nothing here which can be tortured into any authorization of the perpetual apostolic corporation discussed in the previous chapters. But the words seem to many to confer on Peter the extraordinary powers and prerogatives claimed and exercised by the Roman pontiff. Such a view of the passage is wholly groundless and unintelligent. It is the offspring of superstition. Few recorded utterances of Jesus afford so strong a confirmation of our faith, as these words when rightly viewed. In the first place, they are beyond doubt genuine words which he really uttered. If they had found their place in Matthew's Gospel, according to Strauss' mythical theory, only after having been transmitted through several generations along the channels of common rumor, they would never have appeared in their present form. Their obscurities would have been removed by explanations in accordance with prevailing opinion. Reporters would have put their own interpretations upon them. Their rough surfaces and sharp angles would have been worn away, as the hardest pebbles become smooth by the long action of water. I would instantly seize on this passage, as bearing unequivocal marks of being a historic report of a real conversation.

Then again they give an exceedingly clear and unequivocal statement of the foundation on which the church of Christ was to rest. In them it is expressly asserted, that Peter, whose name signifies a rock, should be a foundation stone of that church. Some Protestant writers have hesitated to admit that Peter was to

be a foundation stone of the church, and have sought other modes of interpretation. Those modes of interpretation do not deal fairly with the language. "Thou art Peter," that is, a rock, "and on this rock," not on some other rock, "I will build my church." It avails nothing to the argument that the word translated "rock," when applied as Peter's name, is in the masculine gender, but feminine in the other case. That fact has no significancy except that the word, usually feminine, when employed as a man's name would naturally have a masculine termination. The church is often represented, as here, under the figure of a building, a temple of the living God. It was to be a living temple built of living stones. Peter was to be made a living stone in its very foundation. We are also told why he was to be such a foundation stone. It was because of his clear discernment and bold, strong utterance of that one truth, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That one truth was to be the attractive force, or I might more correctly say, the organic force by which the whole edifice was to be constructed and cemented together for all the ages. The foundation of that living temple was to be laid at Jerusalem, not many days after the resurrection. It is simply a matter of history, that there and then Peter was the foremost of the apostles to declare the truth that the crucified Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God, proved to be such by his resurrection from the dead, and that he had such power in the preaching of that truth, that his personality became forever identified with the founding of the church of God on earth. Every true believer in Jesus is a living stone in the structure of that temple. Peter, by his early, bold and strong utterance of that organic truth, became a princi-

pal living stone in the foundation itself. This and this only is the primacy of Peter.

I cannot forbear remarking as I pass, how conspicuously the prophetic power of Jesus, and the comprehensiveness of his plan, appear in this very remarkable passage. He knew well the great primary fact of his Messiahship, though in his humiliation. He had had great difficulty in leading his disciples to understand it. But his soul was at that moment exultant at the indications, that light was dawning on the vision of at least one of his disciples. He clearly foresaw the crucifixion, the resurrection and the day of Pentecost, and the power with which Peter would then and there publish the glad tidings, and by so doing lay the foundations of his kingdom.

But it is said, that other powers are conferred on Peter in this remarkable passage. What of them? Was not Peter to have the keys of the kingdom of heaven intrusted to him? Does not this imply, that he had the power to open and shut the church of Christ to whom he would? Was it not promised to him, that what he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven? Does not this imply that if he should hold men fast to the penal consequences of their sins, they would be held fast in the court of heaven; and that if he should, by absolution, sunder the tie that unites the sinner to his punishment, heaven would release him also? The sensitive soul is filled with shuddering horror in contemplating the control which frail, erring men, with all the weakness and ignorance of our common humanity, have affected and been believed to exercise over the everlasting destiny of uncounted millions of their fellow-mortals, under the grant of power which these words have been assumed to confer.

But let the reader attentively consider these words

again. The interpretation of them to which I refer is the result of seeing them only under the sombre shadows of superstition, as the most familiar objects seen in a dense mist are often distorted by a morbid and terrified imagination into hideous spectres of mystery and terror. The words of Jesus confer no power on any human being except Peter in person, and contain no hint of a promise of like power to any other person in that or any future generation. When Peter died, these words, whatever their import may have been, had spent their force, and their whole meaning had been fulfilled. The question of succession to the apostolic office will be further examined in another place. It is enough for our present purpose, that there is no intimation here, that Peter was to have any successor to the enjoyment of the powers and privileges here conferred on him.

What then were the powers and privileges conferred on Peter? First let us inquire as to the power of the keys. How did Peter in his lifetime exercise the power of opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven? The answer must readily occur, one would think, to every one. He was the first man that ever did open it. He was the first to preach, to a listening multitude, a crucified Christ risen from the dead. To preach this doctrine is to open the kingdom of heaven. All who embrace this doctrine enter into the kingdom in the very act of embracing it, whether they are met by any official recognition or not. The spiritual relation into which they have come to Christ is membership of the kingdom, all human power to the contrary notwithstanding. If one has not from the heart embraced this doctrine, there is no power on earth that can bring him into the kingdom. Three thousand souls thus entered it through the influence of that first sermon of Peter. On that very day, and in

the events that followed it, Peter was grandly pre-eminent among the disciples. He it was of all the twelve that had the key, and was mighty to open the door and persuade men to enter in. This was the primacy of Peter which our Lord clearly foresaw and predicted, as he looked forward to the crucifixion and to the results which should come from it; and it was his because of his pre-eminence in clear-sighted faith that Jesus was the Christ, and his boldness and eloquence in uttering it. Jesus was a prophet, and Peter's powerful and convincing preaching on the day of Pentecost and the occasions that shortly followed it, was the fulfilment of the prophecy.

It is also worth while to notice, that Peter was not only the first to open the door at Jerusalem, but he was also selected to enjoy the honor of opening it to the Gentiles. This he did at Cæsarea, in the house of Cornelius the Roman centurion, after having been divinely instructed as to what he was to do by a vision from God. The reader should carefully peruse the account of this transaction given by Luke.¹ Surely Peter was pre-eminently among the apostles intrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven. As far as we are enabled to follow him in the subsequent history, he always exhibited the same pre-eminence among his brethren, and no other primacy whatever. These and like events afford a grand fulfilment of the Lord's promise to him, and there is nothing else in his recorded life which can be for a moment regarded as any fulfilment at all.

It may be suggested, that the power of the keys implies the power to shut up the kingdom of heaven, as well as to open it. It may be thought incumbent

¹ Acts x: 1-48.

on me to show how that promise was fulfilled in Peter's life. I do not admit that it is incumbent on me, in order to sustain the interpretation of the passage which I adopt, to show that Peter ever used the power of shutting at all. The fact that Peter possessed and exercised the power of opening the kingdom of heaven to men in a very remarkable degree, sufficiently justifies his being represented under the figure of having the keys, whether he ever performed the office of shutting or not. The mere use of that figure by no means implies that he ever did. Yet it is perfectly easy to show how he performed the office of shutting, as well as of opening. The same proclamation of the joyful news of a crucified and risen Christ, which opens the door of the kingdom to those who joyfully receive the truth, shuts it to all those who reject it. Not only are they shut out of the kingdom by the very act of rejection, but every man who has had the glad news clearly and forcibly set before him, and has rejected it in full view of such a presentation, is farther from the kingdom and all its blessings than he would have been if it had never been presented to him. Resistance to truth and righteousness always blinds the eyes and stiffens the will against them. Paul has expressed this truth with great clearness and power. "For we are unto God a sweet savor in Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish: to the one the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life."¹ Peter did then in the very act of opening the kingdom of heaven to them that believe, shut it more effectually to them that believe not. This is beyond all question the power of the keys which our Lord promised Peter. This power he possessed and abundantly exerted, and he

¹ 2 Cor. ii : 15, 16.

neither claimed nor exercised any other. There is no reason why any Protestant should for a moment entertain the suspicion, that there is anything in these words which favors the pretensions of Rome.

It is sorrowful to contemplate the perversions of this figure of the keys which have resulted from superstition and the spirit of ecclesiastical domination. The gift of this power, as contained in the words on which we are commenting, is peculiar to Peter, only because he first used the key in opening the door of the kingdom of heaven. This privilege can never be enjoyed by any other. But the power of reopening the door is conceded to every one according as he sets forth the truth, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God. It has been imagined by millions, that this power can only be exercised by those who are supposed to be officially placed over the church of God. No greater delusion ever took possession of the minds of men. In the sixteenth century for example, it was not Pope Leo X. that held the power of the keys for all christendom, but Martin Luther and his fellow-laborers in the work of the Reformation, that were opening the doors of the kingdom of heaven so long closed by ghostly superstition, and opening them, not for that age alone, but for all coming ages. All true preachers of righteousness in the name of Jesus Christ are pre-eminently invested with the power of the keys, and they who profess to exercise that power in virtue of their pretended relation to a perpetual priestly corporation, have indeed available power to shut the kingdom of heaven against men, but none whatever to open it. They have taken away the key of knowledge; they neither go in themselves nor suffer them who are entering to go in.

Nothing has yet been said of the power of binding and loosing which was also promised to Peter. This

phraseology is no less important to a just understanding of the subject than the gift of the keys. The same phraseology occurs in another memorable utterance of our Lord, which should therefore be considered in this connection. It is as follows:—

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”¹

There is no reason for regarding these words as addressed to the disciples in any official capacity. Indeed the intercourse between Jesus and his disciples is always precisely such as is to be expected between a teacher and his pupils. These words were evidently intended as rules of conduct to all his followers, in whatever condition of life. It was not an apostle, but every disciple, to whom it was said, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” If any one, however humble in station, by following this rule, persuades his brother to repent, he gains his brother, and as completely releases

¹ Matt. xviii: 15–20.

him from the bonds of iniquity, as the whole church or an apostle could. The same is true of the joint action of the two or three that should make the second attempt, and they might be the obscurest and humblest of the disciples. They were not acting in any official capacity, but simply as brethren in the Lord. If these failed, the person injured must tell it to the church, not at all for the purpose of obtaining any authoritative decision, but to bring to bear a stronger moral force for the accomplishment of the one object of the whole proceeding, to gain the brother by persuading him to repent. If he heard the church, he would be absolved (loosed) precisely in the same manner that he would have been if he had yielded to the first admonition. The only difference would be, that in the one case the individual brother would have loosed him by his loving persuasion; in the other the whole church would have exerted its precisely similar moral influence, to accomplish exactly the same thing. In case of successful persuasion, the individual brother had just as much and just as valid power to loose him as the whole church. In both cases, the power of loosing is simply and only the power to bring to repentance by loving persuasion.

The word *ἐκκλησία*, here translated "church," occurs nowhere in the four Gospels, except in this passage and that before quoted from the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. The reason why it does not more frequently occur is doubtless to be found in the fact, that the existence of particular churches, such as those of Jerusalem, Antioch and Corinth, did not begin till after the day of Pentecost. Previous to that time therefore, there was very little occasion for the use of the word in the strictly Christian sense. Still both Jesus and his disciples, and the Jews generally had been accustomed to weekly assemblies for worship at the synagogue, and

we know that Jesus used to attend them. Could we see life as it then was in Galilee, I apprehend we should be very agreeably surprised to learn how closely it resembled, in this respect, what we are familiar with in our own times. The people of Galilee were probably accustomed to assemble on their Sabbath for religious instruction and worship very much as we do. These assemblies were in all probability called by the same Greek name afterwards used to denote the Christian assembly, at least by all who used the Greek language. To this use of the Greek word, or of the corresponding word in their own vernacular, the disciples were doubtless accustomed from childhood, and when our Lord used the word on these occasions, they would have no doubt of his meaning. Indeed, from the history given in the Acts, it is evident that the first propagators of the doctrine of Christ never did separate their assemblies from those of the synagogue, except as such separation was rendered necessary by the opposition of unbelieving Jews. They did not regard themselves as teaching a new religion, but the identical religion of the Old Testament, interpreted according to its true intent and import. It was necessary to make this explanation, in order that what follows may be better understood.

Suppose then, that when the offence was told to the church, the offender would not hear them, what then? Our Lord explicitly answers, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." I cannot call to mind the interpretation that has been put on these words within my own knowledge and memory without great sorrow. Indeed is there not reason to fear, that they are still seen through a blinding mist by very many readers of the New Testament? The interpretation almost universally put on them is, that if the offender

will not hear the church, that body is to pronounce upon him the sentence of excommunication. This is supposed to be essentially implied in the power of the keys, and in the power of binding and loosing here spoken of. This interpretation certainly cannot be maintained. Jesus began by addressing an individual, and he continues to address an individual all the way through. He tells what that individual is to do in the first instance, and what he is to do in case of failure in the first instance. He then instructs the same individual, that in case of failure in the second instance to bring the offender to repentance, he is to tell it to the church, still having the same end in view. If the same individual cannot succeed in accomplishing the end by the aid of the church, our Lord also tells him what he is to do in that case. Let him be unto thee (to that same individual) as an heathen man and a publican. The grammatical structure does not admit of any other interpretation. The language does not imply, that the church has any function in the premises, except to use its influence in trying to gain the offending brother. In case of failure to accomplish this, our Lord tells the individual what he is to do, but does not tell the church what it is to do, or intimate that it is to do anything.

The error in the case lies in the assumption, that the power of the keys and of the binding and loosing here spoken of is a power of the church in its corporate capacity, and that it is to be exercised by a corporate act. While we continue to adhere to that error, we shall utterly fail to understand our Lord's words in either of these conversations. The dim mists of superstition will still gather around them, and they will seem to favor the high pretensions of priestly usurpation. They are not corporate or priestly powers, but powers possessed according to his measure by every individual

disciple, to open the kingdom of heaven to men by exhibiting to them the crucified Christ, and loosing men from the bonds of iniquity by persuading them to repent. The full light of the Christian dispensation can never shine on the church of God, till this interpretation is universally accepted, in place of the arrogant pretensions of ecclesiastical and priestly usurpation. I by no means deny, that in a case like the one under consideration, it is a matter of course that all the members of the church who had co-operated in efforts to bring the offender to repentance would, in the case of failure, approve of the conduct of the offended brother in regarding the offender as an heathen man and a publican, and would themselves so regard and treat him. But this follows from the nature of the case and the mutual relations of the parties, and not from any ecclesiastical powers conferred on the church by these words of our Lord.

Before we leave this part of the subject, it is important to inquire what is the precise thing which the offended individual is instructed to do. What is it to be as an heathen man and a publican? Images of horror thicken around the mind, as one thinks of the interpretation put for ages on these words. They have been made to imply all the curses of the greater ex-communication of the papal church, — curses which have often sent terror to the hearts of kings and emperors, and made them tremble on their thrones. We never can divest these words of these associations, till we admit that the power of the keys and the power of absolution are not corporate and ecclesiastical, but moral and spiritual. These words simply express the relation in which the injured brother would stand to the offender, after the failure of all efforts to reclaim him. He would stand related to him just as he did to all heathens

and pagans around him, to all who are not Christian brethren, because they do not believe in Christ, but are to be won to faith and repentance if possible. The Master would simply say to such a one, You have done what you could to release that man by loving persuasion, both of yourself and your brethren, from the bonds of his iniquity. But you have failed, and he therefore remains, without any fault of yours, in the bondage of his sin.

From these considerations, we may be perfectly assured, that the words of our Lord which we have been considering can have no reference whatever to what are ordinarily called church censures. Still more may we be assured, that the impression upon so many minds, that these words of our Lord have any reference whatever to the use of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the church, is quite groundless. The keys are not the emblem of a grant of power to admit men to these rites and to exclude men from them. It would be a sufficient reason to exclude this interpretation, that, at the time when they were uttered, the observance of neither of these rites had as yet been enjoined on the disciples, and it was therefore impossible that they should have understood our Lord as referring to those rites. To this however it must be added, that when afterwards he enjoined the observance of them, the one just before the crucifixion, and the other just after the resurrection, he made no allusion, in respect to either of them, to any such power of the keys and of binding and loosing. The application of this language to express the power to admit to and exclude from these rites is entirely a matter of conjecture and assumption. But, beyond all this it has I trust been made perfectly apparent that the spirit of these words admits of no such interpretation, that they cannot describe a corporate and admin-

istrative power, and that their import is entirely moral and spiritual, that they express that opening and shutting of the kingdom of heaven which is accomplished by the preaching of the crucified and risen Christ. It may be possible to find elsewhere such a grant of power to admit to and exclude from participation in these rites, but it certainly is not conferred in the words of our Lord which we have been considering.

Besides the two passages quoted in this chapter from the Gospel of Matthew, I know not that there are any other sayings of our Lord, which have any appearance of favoring the idea of an apostolic corporation, for the government of the church in all ages. These, it has been shown, have that appearance only in consequence of glosses foisted upon them in times of ignorance and superstition, and long transmitted from generation to generation by superstitious awe and terror. As soon as they are examined in the light of a sound exegesis, even by the most eminent Episcopal scholars, one of them is found to be a promise made to Peter personally, of his eminent usefulness among the apostles as a bold and earnest preacher of the glad tidings of Jesus the crucified and risen Christ; and the other is found to be a series of practical instructions to every individual disciple, as to the manner in which he should proceed, in case of being injured or offended by the conduct of any one who was recognized as a Christian brother. No hint can be found in it of any power conferred on the apostles for the perpetual government of the church, not even on Peter for governing it during his own lifetime. All the powers promised to him were purely moral and spiritual, none of them were in any sort judicial, legislative or administrative. The church was to be organized and bound together only by the moral force of faith in the crucified Messiah risen from the

followers in all after times were to succeed to a participation with the apostles and with Christ himself in the exercise of this moral authority. As there is to be no end to the increase of his kingdom, this royal succession is to be perpetual, and it is the only royal succession which is possible in the kingdom of God.

The same principles hold in respect to the priestly succession. When the Mëssiah offered up himself for the sins of the world on the cross, he absorbed into himself the whole priestly function. In virtue of that one sacrifice, in which he was both the priest and the victim, he became the one only high-priest of all the future, not for the purpose of offering any other sacrifice, but because he did there and then offer the one sacrifice towards which all priesthood pointed. He therefore remains the only priest forever. There can therefore be no literal succession to the Christian priesthood. But here also there is a spiritual succession. The apostle Peter speaks of the followers of Christ as "an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."¹ The meaning is very obvious. As Jesus, the Mediator, wholly consecrated himself to the cause of human salvation, at the expense of enduring the sufferings of the cross, in like manner and in a like spirit are all his followers to consecrate themselves to the same cause. To this spiritual succession in the priesthood there can be no end. The priestly like the royal succession is to be perpetual. Jesus hath made all the long succession of his followers to be kings *and* priests unto God forever.

Is there then a perpetual succession of the apostolic office? And if so, what is its nature? Is it official and priestly, or moral and spiritual? In order to answer

¹ 1 Peter ii: 5.

these questions, it is necessary to inquire what the function of the apostolic office really was. It has been shown, I hope, conclusively, that they were not a perpetual corporation for the government of the church in all ages, and that the Lord's Supper was not intrusted to them and their official successors to be dispensed to the people. Yet the twelve apostles must have been selected by our Lord to perform some exceedingly grave and important function in establishing his kingdom. We cannot otherwise account for his having selected them so early in his ministry, for his keeping them constantly in his company, and for the care and painstaking with which he instructed them. What then was that function? This question is of the utmost importance to the whole history of early Christianity, and, unless it can be definitely answered, our knowledge of the subject must be very vague and unsatisfactory. There are two portions of the apostolic writings, which answer this question as definitely as could possibly be desired. One of them is the following:—

“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.”¹

The other testimony referred to above is the following:—

¹ Luke xxiv : 44-48.

“Wherefore, of these men which have companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”¹

In the first of these passages we are explicitly told by the Lord himself in his last address to the twelve, just before his ascension, what their function was to be. After having briefly recapitulated the substance of his instructions to them, and the matters of fact on which he relied for the establishment and perpetuity of his kingdom, he said to them, “Ye are witnesses of these things.” They were to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah, that he was crucified and rose from the dead, and to preach remission of sins in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. This was their function. For this he had selected them, and made it the leading aim of all his ministry to instruct them and qualify them for the performance of it. His influence on all the future of the world was to be transmitted through these men. Through them the world was to be made acquainted with his teachings and his life, and especially with the facts of his crucifixion and resurrection. He had so trained and instructed them, that they

¹ Acts i: 21-26.

appreciated what he had said and done and suffered, and were qualified to give authentic testimony. They were to be original witnesses, in such a sense original, that it was for the most part impossible for the world ever to know with certainty of the things which related to Jesus the Christ, except through their words. We have no evidence that they ever did perform any other function, and we know that they did perform this in the first beginnings of the gospel at Jerusalem, in spreading abroad the knowledge of it among the nations, and in imparting it to future times, insomuch that all that we know of Jesus the Christ has come to us through their testimony.

The passage quoted from the Acts of the Apostles assures us, that the apostles themselves had precisely this understanding of their function, and is in one respect still more specifically to our purpose, inasmuch as it informs us that the apostles esteemed it an indispensable qualification for the apostolic office, that one should have companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, and thus be qualified to be with them a witness of his resurrection. This inevitably implies that no one could be an apostle who could not appear as a personal witness of these things. It may be objected to this, that Paul was reckoned an apostle, though he did not embrace the Christian faith till some time after the founding of the church at Jerusalem. To this I reply, that this objection is deprived of all its force by the fact, that Paul did personally see the Lord at the time of his conversion, and distinctly claims that he derived all his knowledge of the doctrine of Christ from direct revelation. "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of

Jesus Christ.”¹ It was then a recognized qualification for the apostolic office, that one should have a personal knowledge of the doctrine of Christ by direct intercourse with Christ himself.

The nature of the apostolic function, whether as indicated by the Lord himself in his parting address to the disciples, or as understood by the apostles, decisively excludes the possibility of any succession. In the nature of things, there could be no succession beyond that generation of original witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evidence is complete, that it was the apostolic function to give personal testimony of these things. An official apostolic succession, much as the idea has figured in ecclesiastical history, and conspicuous as is the place which it holds in the present organizations of christendom, is an impossibility, an absurdity, a contradiction in terms. It should be sufficient to induce all candid men to abandon this creation of the imagination in dark and ignorant ages, that Jesus gave no intimation of any such official succession in instituting the Supper, or in any of his confidential conversations with his disciples. But we are not compelled to rest the case on the mere absence of any intimation of the perpetuity of the apostolic office in the church. A definition of the office is given with great precision and exactness, which renders its perpetuity absurd and impossible. I am perfectly aware of the array of ecclesiastical power and ecclesiastical precedent which confronts and resists this conclusion. But no confidence of assumption, and no array of hoary precedents, can stand forever against stern fact and sound logical argument. There are Christian men and Christian scholars in the nineteenth century who

¹ Gal. i: 11, 12.

do feel the unanswerable force of this argument, and know that the assumption of a perpetual apostolic office in the church rests on no foundation of fact or argument; and they will never lose sight of the facts as they stand in the sacred record, or cease to urge them upon the consideration of mankind, till they exert their legitimate influence on the organizations of christendom. If those who pretend to be the successors of the apostles in the nineteenth century, can show that, like Paul, they have personally seen the Lord, and received their whole knowledge of the doctrine of Christ by direct revelation from him, then will the validity of their claim be reverently admitted. If they cannot show this, their pretended apostolic authority will be regarded by all scholarly men as a superstitious delusion, which would be pitiable if it were not a shocking usurpation in the household of God.

If they were able even to prove, that, like Paul, they had received a knowledge of these things by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ, we could still concede to them only those powers and functions which the original twelve exercised. They could, even in that case, only be to us witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We could not concede to them a power to govern the churches, and to keep in their charge the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and an exclusive authority to exhibit and dispense them to the people, which the original apostles never claimed or exercised, unless they could convince us that they had themselves received such a grant of powers by direct revelation from God.

Is there then no apostolic succession? Officially, there certainly is none. It is a sickly dream of superstition, from which it is high time the Christian world should be awaked. But a perpetual spiritual succession

there is, just as in the case of the kingly and priestly functions. The apostles were witnesses of these things. They were original witnesses, which no one else can be, any more than any successor of Peter could be the first to open the kingdom of heaven. But all followers of Christ can and do give valuable testimony to the Christian cause, each one in proportion to the extent of his knowledge and experience. All the Christians of the apostolic age gave testimony which is of very great importance to all subsequent ages, in respect to the fundamental facts of Christianity. Without their concurrent testimony, that of the apostles would have been unavailing. In order to make this point plain it is necessary to resort to an illustration. The very hinge of the argument for the supernatural origin of the Christian religion is the conclusive proof that the crucified Christ really rose from the dead. The apostles clearly saw the importance of this point to the success of their mission, and made haste to select one under the guidance of the divine Spirit, who, with them, should bear witness to the resurrection, in place of the traitor Judas. But it was not enough that this point should be made evident to the men of that generation. It was also necessary to transmit that evidence to after ages. How could this be done? How can the fact be proved to the men of our own time? It is impossible to retry the question on the original evidence. Much of that evidence was of such a nature, that it could not be transmitted to any subsequent age, and could therefore never be produced in any retrial of the question. To all subsequent ages therefore the effect of that evidence on the age in which the event occurred comes in the place of the evidence itself. What that effect was, we learn, not from the words, but from the deeds of the vast multitudes who in different countries forsook the

religion of their fathers, and, in circumstances the most forbidding, avowed their faith in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. The fact that the testimony of the apostles was so received by vast multitudes, not only at Jerusalem, but in every part of the Roman Empire, is to us a convincing proof, that the witness given by the apostles to these fundamental facts of Christianity had irresistible force, and could not be successfully gainsaid by the numerous active and persecuting enemies of Christianity. Thus the testimony to the truth of these things by the thousands who in that age embraced Christianity becomes no less important to subsequent ages than the testimony of the original witnesses was to that age. The one is an indispensable supplement to the other, as a means of conveying the Christian faith onwards to after-times. In like manner, though not in the same degree, the testimony of every age is important to all the ages that are to follow. There is need of an unbroken line of testimony to convey the faith of Christ down to all the future. How much for example is the present age indebted, not only to the bold and overpowering argument of the leaders of the Protestant reformation, but to the testimony given by millions, of the power of that argument over their own minds, by their faithful adherence to the reformation, in face of all dangers and conflicts.

No testimony of the men of the apostolic age could add anything to that of the original witnesses, who were personally acquainted with the fundamental facts of Christianity. If other Christians of that age gave testimony which was additional to that of the original witnesses, or contradictory of it, such testimony would be worthy of no confidence; for it would proceed from persons who had no original acquaintance with

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the facts, and were therefore incompetent to testify. All which the Christians of that age, other than the original witnesses were competent to do, was to give assurance by their lives and faithful devotion to Christianity, in face of all the persecutions which they encountered, to the convincing power of the Christian story as they received it from those who had personal knowledge of it. This testimony they abundantly gave, and it is an exceedingly important link in the chain of evidence. It is not necessary to enter into any argument here to show, that the fact that multitudes in that age rejected the Christian story, does not neutralize the evidence in its favor which arises from the cordial faith and earnest Christian lives of those who embraced it.

In like manner the only function of the witnesses who appeared in succeeding ages, was to transmit with their earnest indorsement the story which had been handed down to them from the original witnesses. If they added anything which was not contained in the testimony of the original witnesses, it would have been worthy of no confidence. It has already been shown that there were, not only in the age of the apostles but in the ages which immediately succeeded it, powerful tendencies to incorporate with the prevalent conception of Christianity, ideas derived from the hoary paganism from which most of the members of the early church had been converted. It is not to be supposed, that they were entirely and at once divested of all the ideas which they had derived from the religion of their childhood and of their fathers, and brought up to a full appreciation of that spiritual system which Jesus founded. If therefore we find, in the Christianity of the ages that followed that of the apostles, ideas, customs and modes of government of which the original witnesses to Christianity give us no intimation, the fair inference

is, not that these Christians in the after ages must have derived such ideas by tradition from the apostles, but that they incorporated them with the new religion which they had embraced, from the religion to which they and their fathers had been accustomed through immemorial ages. In other words, it is far more probable that Christianity had been corrupted than that the original witnesses had handed down to subsequent ages, by oral tradition and established custom, things of which they had left no trace in their written records. Any one who thoroughly appreciates the social state which Jesus Christ proposed to found, and is well acquainted with the condition of society, and especially of morality and religion in the centuries next succeeding the apostolic age, will be very slow to consent to correct or to supplement the former, as represented to us by the original witnesses, by any ideas or customs derived from the latter.

Nor is this testimony given alone from each age to all succeeding ages. It is given by every individual disciple to those of his own time, to the world all around him. By nothing is that indifference to the spiritual truths with which Christianity deals, which is so characteristic of the ordinary course of the world, so likely to be overcome, and the attention of men strongly turned to spiritual things, as by the earnest words and corresponding deeds of Christian disciples, who speak what they do know and testify what they have seen. The solemn testimony of earnest, honest believers in Christ is one of the principal forces by which Christianity always makes its way in the world. To be a witness to Christian truth is one of the foremost privileges and duties of every disciple in every age. Thus the apostolic function, like the kingly and the priestly, is shared by even the humblest disciple. Mrs. Stowe's

Uncle Tom, in hopeless slavery on Simon Legree's Red River plantation, is a spiritual sharer in each glorious apostolic function. He is an apostle of spiritual truth.

The kingdom of heaven is grandly unlike any other kingdom. It is in the very highest sense a monarchy. The Messiah of God is its supreme ruler and Lord, its founder, legislator and judge, and every individual subject owes him absolute allegiance. Yet it is the perfection of a republic. The entire administration of the government is participated in by every individual citizen just in proportion to his knowledge, wisdom and virtue. To such a share in the administration every human being succeeds in virtue of his becoming a loyal subject. This chain of succession can be traced back without a wanting link, by the clearest historic evidence, to the dim antiquity of the times of the patriarchs. It is not lost in the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt. It becomes conspicuous in their deliverance from Egyptian oppression. It is distinctly traceable amid the comparative barbarism and anarchy of the times of the judges. It is reaffirmed and re-established in the religious monarchy of David and Solomon and their royal successors. It is clearly manifested in the times of the Babylonish captivity. It survives amid the struggles of the true worshippers of God with their pagan persecutors after the captivity, and is incorporated in the Messianic kingdom, and is made the established order of all succeeding ages. It combines in itself a perfect assurance of the entire loyalty of every subject to the kingdom of heaven, with the guarantee of his perfect spiritual freedom, and his participation in the administration of the government, according to the measure of his wisdom and virtue. It is a succession which ends not with the present life, but has the promise

of the immortal future. All the faithful disciples of Christ are to become kings and priests unto God, and reign with him forever. Compared with the grandeur of such a succession, all the splendor with which the pretended official succession from the apostles has been invested becomes poor and contemptible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

IN that venerable formula of faith which has come down to us from the early church, known as the Apostles' Creed, though I think it contains abundant internal evidence that it did not originate with the apostles, the Christian professes his belief "in the holy Catholic Church." The word "catholic" is not found in Scripture. It is a generalization not much in the style of Scriptural phraseology. It is not even found in some of the earlier forms of the Apostles' Creed. In that used in the church of Rome in the early ages, we have simply "the holy church."¹ But the word expresses an article in the faith of every intelligent Christian. The kingdom of God which Jesus was to found was to be universal, both in respect to its exercising dominion over all people, nations and languages, and over all the ages of the future. The kingdom given unto one like unto the Son of man was to be such, that "all people, nations and languages should serve him," and his dominion was never to pass away. In like manner Jesus himself represented the matter. In the parable of the tares of the field, "the kingdom of heaven" is represented as having "the world for its field," and its duration was to be till "the end of the world." No church can have

¹ Bunsen's Hippolytus and his Age, Vol. XI. p. 21.

any claim to be the representative of this kingdom of heaven which is not in both these respects catholic, that is, universal. It must recognize as its members all the true followers of Jesus the Christ; and it must have endured from the founding of the church at Jerusalem to the present time, and it must have the promise and the purpose of perpetuating its dominion while time shall last. I devoutly express my faith "in the Holy Catholic Church," and I refuse to recognize as catholic any upstart organization, either of mediæval or of modern ages, or any association of men called the church of Christ, however influential by numbers and power, or however venerable by antiquity, which does not lovingly embrace within itself the entire brotherhood of Christ.

But it is of incalculable importance to all the disciples of the one crucified Christ in this age to settle one question in respect to it, about which our opinions and practices are so greatly at variance, as to present to the looker-on a strange spectacle of contradiction and confusion. In what sense is the church to be catholic? In what does true catholicity consist? Two conceptions of catholicity are possible, two conceptions of that universal dominion which the Son of man was to exercise. The one is that it is to be visible, official, administrative, organic, with a human head and a perpetual human magistracy. The other is that it is a moral and spiritual dominion, exercised over men invisibly by the truth and spirit of God, and rendered visible only by the external badges of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the presence of the truth as it is in Jesus bearing its appropriate fruits of righteousness. In the introductory chapter of this work it was stated, that three propositions have been tenaciously held perhaps by a majority of those who in different ages have borne the Christian name, as undoubtedly sanctioned by the

Founder of Christianity. The first two of these propositions have been examined in the previous chapters, and have been found not only unsustained by any authority of the Founder of the church, but to be contradictory to the spirit and leading aim of his mission to this world. It was shown that they originated, not in his teaching or example, but in the inability of corrupt and superstitious ages to appreciate the spirituality of his system.

The third of these propositions remains to be examined. It is, that the whole Christian church or kingdom of heaven as Jesus conceived of it was intended to present a visible organic unity, under a government perpetually administered by a succession of human officials, or in other words, that the catholicity of the church was to be organic, administrative. It has already been made apparent, that Jesus himself never manifested any intention of providing for the government of his kingdom by a succession of human officials. To what has already been said on that subject, it is proper here to add that nothing can well be stronger or more decisive than his denial of any such intention, when at the interrogation of Pilate he said, "My kingdom is not of this world." This answer was given in such a spirit as quite to remove all Pilate's apprehensions that Jesus was meditating a kingdom which would be a rival of the universal empire of the Cæsars. In order to set this matter in a clear light, let us suppose that Pilate had understood Jesus to admit, that although the kingdom he proposed to establish would not interfere with the strictly civil or military affairs of the empire, he did intend to establish an independent religious sovereignty over the whole earth, and to vest the administration of it in the hands of a succession of human officials, over the appointment of whom the emperor could exercise no authority or

influence, and that that sovereignty would take from the empire all its religious functions and exert such control over all matters pertaining to religion and morals everywhere and always, as the bishop of Rome and his successors claimed and exercised a few centuries later, and that that religious sovereignty was to be universal and perpetual; if Pilate had so understood him when he denied that his kingdom was of this world, would the suspicious fears of the Roman governor have been quieted by the answer? Would he have gone out and said to the people, "I find no fault in this man"? Would he not rather have instantly ordered him to be crucified, without any suggestion from the chief priests and scribes? There is no ambiguity in Jesus' answer on this occasion. He undoubtedly meant to be understood as denying that he intended establishing any sovereignty with an earthly and human administration.

There is no denying that this is the form in which the matter was put and left by Jesus himself. But it is reasonable to inquire how the apostles understood the matter, for they were to be his witnesses. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to study the Acts of the Apostles, to ascertain what they have said of it, and what were their understandings of the Master as indicated by the manner in which they constituted the churches which they organized. This part of the subject cannot be understood without noticing the fact that the word "church" is used in the New Testament in two, and only two senses. It sometimes means the church universal, the catholic church, the kingdom of heaven. "On this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." "For the husband is the head of the

wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.”¹ We can have no difficulty in such cases as these in understanding by the word “church,” not any particular local organization, as the church at Jerusalem, the church at Antioch, the church at Corinth, but the church universal, the kingdom of heaven.

The other sense in which the word “church” is used is to describe a local society of believers in Christ, united together for purposes of mutual edification and co-operation in the work of the Lord. The organization of such societies is not a matter of direct and specific command, nor do we anywhere find a prescribed constitution, according to which they were to be organized. As a matter of fact, such societies came into existence wherever the gospel was preached and converts were made. They sustained precisely the same relation to the church universal, the Christian institution, that the synagogues did to the system instituted by Moses. They were not divinely appointed as a part of the institution, and exercised no control over the rites, ceremonies or priesthood of the Jewish religion. They grew out of the conscious wants and social instincts of a devout, God-fearing people, and at the time of the Christian era seem to have existed wherever there were settlements of devout Jews.

In like manner and by a like universal necessity, the ecclesiæ of Christians grew up everywhere, as soon as there were converts, often in the Jewish synagogue itself. If a person embraced Christ in any part of the world, he would feel an intense longing for the acquaintance and society of other disciples of Christ; and as soon as he found such he would permanently associate himself with them, by a spiritual instinct as strong and

¹ Eph. v: 23-32.

universal as that by which human beings organize human society. These local societies are not otherwise of divine appointment than that the spiritual instincts from which they originate are the fruits of the Spirit. In order to understand the constitution of the apostolic churches, and rightly to infer from it their understanding of the divine conception, we must inquire how these churches stood related to each other and to the church universal, and what was their internal constitution, or as it is commonly called, discipline.

We must look for the answer to the first of these inquiries to the testimony of these apostles themselves, and not to the usages of any subsequent age. It will be proved in subsequent chapters, that at a very early period after the death of the apostles the constitution of these churches underwent great and very important changes, and that consequently we cannot infer the constitution of the apostolic churches from what existed in those subsequent ages.

From the day of Pentecost onwards, it is evident that the apostles and early converts understood him. We never hear anything more from them about "restoring the kingdom again to Israel," or establishing any other sovereignty in human hands. But the men of that age were not able to appreciate the conception of a purely moral and spiritual authority, which was to be universal and perpetual. Soon the idea of a temporal and earthly organization of the kingdom of heaven again took possession of men's minds, and began to modify the government of the church. One of the most profound generalizations of the French political philosopher De Tocqueville is the following: —

"Every religion is found in juxtaposition to a political opinion, which is connected with it by affinity. If the human mind be left to its own bent, it will regulate

the temporal and spiritual relations of society upon one uniform principle ; and man will endeavor, if I may use the expression, to harmonize the state in which he lives upon earth, with the state he believes to await him in heaven."

This generalization is as just as it is profound. The effort of the human mind to harmonize the temporal and the spiritual will sometimes employ itself in modifying the one, and sometimes the other, according to the circumstances in which the desired adjustment is to be made. If one of the elements to be harmonized is rigid and intractable, and the other pliant and ductile, all the changes will be made at the expense of the latter. In that age, nothing on earth was so rigid and iron-bound as the mighty structure of Roman civil and military polity. Christianity on the contrary, in all that respected its organization, was in the very gristle of its infancy. In the effort therefore to bring the political and religious systems that prevailed in the empire into harmony, all the changes were sure to be effected at the expense of the latter. Add to this consideration the fact, that the churches were chiefly composed of converts from the old paganism of the Greeks and Romans, to whom religion had been from immemorial ages altogether an affair of the state, and who were therefore accustomed to religious forms that were prescribed and regulated by public authority. They had nominally renounced paganism and joined themselves to the Christian church. But they had necessarily brought many of their pagan ideas with them, and were ready to see with pleasure many of the forms and customs of their childhood incorporated into the new religion which they had adopted. If to this we add the fact, that for

¹ Democracy in America, Reeves's translation, page 281.

ages the mind of the whole empire had been dazzled with the splendid conception of one vast political power, incomparably the grandest that had ever existed in the world, we shall be quite prepared to understand, that there was throughout the empire a powerful tendency to commit the government of the church to persons invested with authority to rule, and to centralize that authority as much as possible after the pattern of the great centralized system by which the empire was governed. While therefore in endeavoring to ascertain how the Founder of Christianity intended to constitute the church, it is perfectly reasonable to inquire how the apostles to whom he committed the matter understood his intentions, and to examine the organizations which they established as indicating what their understanding was; it is most unreasonable to expect to find, in the ages which followed the death of the apostles, any trustworthy models either of faith or organization. We might as well look to the times of Trajan and the Antonines for a model of the Roman republic, as to the church of their times for the constitution which the Founder intended. The church, as we find it delineated in the acts and the letters of the apostles, is undoubtedly indicative of their understanding of the Master's intentions. It is therefore most important to the purpose we have in hand carefully to examine the churches they founded, and the constitutional principles which they promulgated.

The foremost fact that meets us in such an examination is the entire absence of any official centralization. The local Christian societies which the apostles founded were independent communities. On this point I have the pleasure of citing the authority of Archbishop Whately. His statement of the case is as follows:—

“It appears plainly from the sacred narrative that,

though the many churches which the apostles founded were branches of one *scriptural brotherhood*,—though there was ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ for all of them, yet they were each a distinct, independent community *on earth*, united by the common principles on which they were founded, and by their mutual agreement, affection and respect, but not having any one head on earth, or acknowledging any sovereignty of one of the societies over another.”¹

I know but one mode of escaping from this conclusion. It is to maintain that, though each of the churches founded by the apostles had a distinct and separate corporate existence, they were united into one organic whole by the system of General Councils. I find such a claim actually set up, and it is said the first General Council was held at Jerusalem, in apostolic days, and with full apostolic sanction and participation. Archbishop Whately shall dispose of this matter for us. He says:—

“And as for the so-called General Councils, we find not any mention or allusion to any such expedient. The pretended first council at Jerusalem does seem to me a most extraordinary chimera, without any warrant whatever from sacred history.”²

The facts upon which the claim is set up that a General Council of the church was held at Jerusalem in apostolic times are as follows:³ Certain men who came down to Antioch from Judæa taught the disciples, many of whom were Gentiles, that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses. As the gospel had originated at Jerusalem, persons coming from thence and claiming to represent the views

¹ Kingdom of Christ Delineated, Essay II., Sect. 15.

² Ibid.

³ Acts xv.

which prevailed there, would naturally have great influence, especially as that was still the place of residence of most of the original witnesses to the fundamental Christian facts, and the chief seat of the Christian mission. Considerable discussion having been occasioned at Antioch by the teaching of these men, it was determined to send Paul and Barnabas and certain other brethren to Jerusalem, to consult the apostles and elders there about the matter.

It is obvious, that there is no ground for pretending that this was a General Council of the church. Nobody was consulted but the apostles, elders and brethren of the church at Jerusalem. No delegates were present from other churches, except the men who were appointed by the church at Antioch to go up to Jerusalem and ask advice about the matter. Advice was not asked from a council of the church universal, but from the apostles, elders and brethren of the one church at Jerusalem. Those who were consulted claimed no authority whatever over the churches. In the document which they put forth, they distinctly assign the reason which induced them to give their advice in the case, in these words: "Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words subverting your souls," etc. It was to undo the mischief which certain who went out from them had done. The case was as though persons should go from this country to some American missionary station in a pagan land, and should so represent the views of the Christian people of this country to a group of converts from heathenism, as to produce dissension and much trouble. The missionaries would naturally enough seek to remedy the evil by sending back to this country, to Boston, if you please, if that was the place from which the missionaries were sent out, some of their own number, accom-

panied by some of their heathen converts, to lay the matter before the friends and promoters of the mission in that city, and obtain from them a correct statement of their views, to be reported back to the converts from heathenism. Could anything be more absurd than to represent this as a General Council of Christendom? Yet it would be precisely like this pretended General Council at Jerusalem. It is, as Archbishop Whately says, "a most extraordinary chimera." The whole system of General Councils for the government of the church universal rests on no other foundation than this chimerical pretension. There is no other hint in the apostolic writings, that a system of centralizing the church by General Councils existed, or had ever been thought of, in the apostolic age.

Some may be disposed to attach importance to the fact that the instrument of writing which was sent out from the consultation speaks of the results arrived at as *δόγματα*, "decrees." The word might with equal propriety have been translated "resolutions." It means the results of deliberation, common opinions arrived at by consultation, and has no reference whatever to any claim of authority over the churches. Neither is it any evidence of the authoritative character of this document that Paul and Silas carried it with them in their missionary journeys, and delivered it to the Christians to keep or observe. In the regions through which they travelled, converts were likely to be made both from Jews and Gentiles, and the same dissensions were likely to arise, which had arisen at Antioch. The opinions of the apostles, elders and brethren at Jerusalem would have weight elsewhere for the same reasons as at Antioch. They would be likely to dissuade Jewish converts from insisting on the observance of the Mosaic rites by converts from among the Gentiles, and to convince the

Gentiles that those rites were not obligatory on the Christian disciples. The document was important on account of its moral authority among the converts, and the use of it as a means of preserving harmony does not imply that it was regarded as an edict of a body claiming the right to govern the churches.

It may still be claimed however, that the apostolic churches were united into an organic whole by the subjection of them all to the government of bishops. This point therefore requires to be examined. That there were official persons in those churches who were sometimes called bishops (*Επίσκοποι*) is certainly beyond controversy. Whether this would imply that the churches were under a centralized government having jurisdiction over them all must depend on the functions of those officers called bishops. When we read in a document of a former age a word with which we are perfectly familiar, and which bears in our own age a well-understood meaning, we are apt to assume, that it had, at the time when the document was written, the same meaning which it has in our own times. This is a fertile source of error in the interpretation of all writings which have come down to us from former ages, and of the Scriptures not less than of other writings. The difficulty is aggravated in the case of the Scriptures by the fact, that we know them chiefly through translations of comparatively recent origin. The translator is always liable to be misled by his own peculiar theories and those of his sect or party, so that the translation will express, not the uncolored results of impartial scholarship, but the distortions of partisan opinion. Certainly the times when King James's version was made were not such as to give any absolute assurance of entire exemption from such influences of partisanship.

In introducing the examination of this matter, I have

great pleasure in stepping aside for a few moments, while the reader attends to the view of this subject presented by the late honored and lamented Henry Alford B. D., Dean of Canterbury. They will be found in his commentary on the following words: "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."¹ He heads his comments on the paragraph of which these are the opening words thus, — "*Precepts respecting overseers* (presbyters)," thus making overseers (bishops) perfectly synonymous with presbyters. A little further down he says, "It is merely laying a trap for misunderstanding to render the word (ἐπίσκοπος), at this time of the church's history, 'the office of a bishop.' The ἐπίσκοποι of the New Testament have officially nothing in common with our bishops." Such an opinion as this from so eminent an Episcopal scholar as Dean Alford might well be regarded as decisive. The severe criticism of the translation, the reader will observe, is his, not mine.

If it could be shown that the bishops mentioned in our translation of the New Testament had the same functions that are claimed and exercised by an Anglican or Roman Catholic diocesan bishop of the present time, then it would follow, that the government of the apostolic churches was centralized by the authority of the bishops. But according to Dean Alford, this is so far from being true, that officially the two had nothing in common. I am persuaded that the most careful and thorough examination of the functions of the officers called bishops in the New Testaments will show, that this assertion is absolutely true. Such an examination I purpose now to institute. The principal functions of a modern bishop are, to invest the clergy with official power to exhibit

¹ 1 Tim. iii: 1.

what are called the "sacraments" of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to admit persons to participation in these sacraments by the rite of confirmation and absolution. There is no evidence whatever that either of these functions was known or thought of in the times of the apostles.

It has already been shown, that no recorded saying of Jesus himself contains any hint of a grant of power to dispense the privilege of participating in the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper to the people. But it is wonderful how deeply the idea has penetrated the minds of the Lord's people in nearly all the Protestant communions, even, that these rites are sacraments, and must be administered by a clergy qualified to perform this function by the laying on of hands in ordination. Within my own knowledge and distinct recollection, so thoroughly have the minds of Presbyterians and Congregationalists been imbued with this idea, that it was regarded as a sort of sacrilege for one who had not received ordination to break the bread and pour out the wine of the Lord's Supper, and deliver them to the people. Did this view of the subject prevail in the apostolic churches? Who can place his finger on any passage of the New Testament which contains the slightest hint that it did? Where is the proof that, in any case in which ordination by the laying on of hands is spoken of, the parties engaged in the transaction understood that it conferred authority not otherwise possessed to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper? In what instance of the baptism of a convert or of the breaking of bread in the name of the Lord, is it implied, that the administration of an ordained minister was necessary to the validity or the propriety of the transaction? One will search the apostolic records in vain for a single example. The idea of a clergy empowered by ordination to administer

the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper with validity or propriety is not in the New Testament, except as it has been thrown back upon it, and interpreted into it, from customs and practices which originated in subsequent ages. Neither is the idea of a sacrament to be administered found in the New Testament. The Lord's Supper of the New Testament is a commemorative feast, to be perpetually observed in all the generations of the Lord's people in grateful remembrance of the crucified Christ.

It may be said, it will be felt by many that read these paragraphs, that this is taking from the Lord's Supper all its sanctity. I beg them to pause and consider their words. I feel the sanctity of that holy observance no less than they. But its sanctity does not lie in the awe-inspiring superstition of a priestly function to give it validity, but in the sacred memories of Gethsemane and Calvary which have been associated with it for more than eighteen centuries, and which carry me back to that night when, in sharp conflict with all the powers of darkness, Jesus Christ won the victory forever. Away, ye profane! Let no priestly functionary intrude his manipulation between any two or three disciples assembled in the name of the Lord, and a suffering triumphant Christ. I have often observed the Lord's Supper with Christian brethren commonly called Campbellites, from their closely following the late Alexander Campbell. They are accustomed to observe the Supper at the close of the service on each Sabbath morning. They do not recognize the necessity of any clergy, qualified by ordination to administer either baptism or the Lord's Supper. Any brother of the church may, by the invitation of his brethren, preside at the table and distribute the bread and the cup. Yet I do not remember to have seen the Supper observed with more

solemn reverence or more fervent devoutness than among these brethren. It certainly cannot be denied, that, in the early history of the churches of this connection, there were some extravagances which cannot be commended ; but it cannot be maintained that their practices in respect to the Lord's Supper are of this character. Good men are generally agreed, that while continuing in those practices, they are rapidly growing in devoutness and spiritual power.

I am quite willing to argue this question, but there is really very little to argue about. As soon as we inquire for the proof that there was an ordained clergy in the apostolic churches, according to our ideas of ordination, the proof vanishes. We look where we expected to find it, but it is not there. We thought it was Scriptural ; it proves to be traditional. There is, however, one ground of argument which must not be overlooked. It is claimed that the apostles did ordain presbyters in particular churches, and that Paul gave instructions to Timothy and Titus about doing the same thing. This matter, then, requires examination.

One of the most important instances adduced is taken from the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas in Asia Minor. "And when they had ordained them elders (*presbyters*) in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed."¹ It is obvious that the apostles must have sustained peculiar relations to the churches they gathered in the midst of the darkness of paganism, and that they must have exercised at first a great deal of watchful care over all their internal arrangements. Not to have done so would have been most culpable negligence. One of the objects of this care would

¹ Acts xiv : 23.

surely be, to see to it that suitable men were selected and intrusted with the spiritual care and oversight of the whole brotherhood. The fact that they exercised a great deal of influence over this matter would certainly not prove, that it was their intention to establish a perpetual class of officers, who should have permanent oversight of the churches. In the example above quoted, our translation represents them to have "ordained elders in every city." The word here translated "ordained" (*χειροτονήσαντες*) does not and cannot mean the laying on of hands as in ordination.¹ I cannot help suspecting that the rendering of this word "ordained" might be justly characterized in the words of Dean Alford on another place, as "laying a trap for misunderstanding." The word means "appointed by suffrages."² The information which we get from the passage is, that as the two missionaries went from place to place, they procured the election, by the vote or the lifting up of the hands of the brotherhood, of elders in every city. It is very probable that these appointments were made by the nomination of Paul and Barnabas. In that way they would procure the appointment of the men whom they thought fittest. In this case there is no intimation that the transaction was accompanied by the laying on of hands. Nothing can be more groundless than the assumption, that in this progress among the churches, Paul and Barnabas ordained clergymen in every city vested with authority to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. The idea originates from no hint in this passage, but is interpreted into it from some other quarter. All which we can learn from these words is, that Paul and Barnabas acted just as

¹ Alford's Greek Testament, Acts xiv: 23

² Dean Alford on the place quoting Erasmus as authority.

any wise and faithful missionaries would act, in providing for the spiritual care and edification of their converts.

It is probable however that those who believe that the apostolic churches were centralized by the government of bishops would attach still greater importance to the instructions given by Paul to Timothy and Titus. To these therefore let us give our attention. The remark should first be made, that these two men were fellow-laborers of Paul, the one at Ephesus, and the other in the island of Crete ; and that on Paul's departure from these fields of labor respectively, he left them in charge of certain matters pertaining to the welfare of the churches, which had not been fully arranged. In the case of Titus the impression is clearly made on the mind, that the charge was temporary, merely to complete certain arrangements which had been begun but not completed under Paul's own superintendence. One of the principal things mentioned is, to "ordain elders in every city." So our translation has it. But I fear we have again "the laying of a trap for misunderstanding." The word translated "ordain" is not the word which signifies the laying on of hands, but *καταστήσεις*, and signifies to constitute or appoint. The mode of appointing is very likely to have been that used by Paul and Barnabas in the churches of Asia Minor. There is no hint of any reference in this case more than in that, to ordination by the laying on of hands. It was appropriate that Paul should give instructions to Titus respecting the selection of suitable persons, because it is highly probable the appointments were made by his nomination. It is also very worthy of note, that while the business Titus was left in charge of was the appointment of elders (*preshyters*), Paul proceeds to give him instructions about selecting bishops (*ἐπίσκοποι*), showing beyond the possibility of mistake,

that, in Paul's understanding of the matter, the words "presbyter" and "bishop" designate the same office. Nothing can be more groundless than either the assumption that Titus was the diocesan bishop of Crete, or that he ordained elders according to the modern import of ordination.

The charge given by Paul to Timothy was certainly not diocesan, whatever else it may have been. It had exclusive reference to the church at Ephesus.¹ It is admitted that reference is made in this epistle to the laying on of hands, as a mode of setting apart church officers to their proper work, and that Timothy was expected to take part in that transaction, and to exert an important influence in selecting those who should be designated to the care and oversight of the Ephesian church. No candid man will deny this, and I can see no reason why the most zealous anti-prelatist should wish to deny it. He will not wish to deny it, if he understands the real state of the argument. It is plain from several allusions to the subject which occur in different parts of the apostolic writings, that in those times the laying on of hands might be practised, whenever persons were designated to any important service in the church, whether temporary or permanent. Thus the brethren of the church at Antioch were instructed of the Holy Ghost to separate Barnabas and Paul to the work whereunto the Spirit had called them. That work was the preaching of Christ among the Gentiles. "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."² It is also apparent that Timothy was set apart to the charge which he held "by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Both in the case of Paul and Barnabas

¹ 1 Tim. iii: 15, Dean Alford's comments. ² Acts xiii: 1-3.

and of Timothy, the designation was made by prophetic intimation. The laying on of hands followed. Whose hands were laid on Paul and Barnabas is not very apparent, though it does appear who the prophets were by whom they were designated. But the gift or charge was imparted to Timothy with the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery." I have the authority of Dean Alford for saying, that by the presbytery is meant the eldership of the church at Ephesus,¹ or of some other particular church. Indications are abundant, that no distinction whatever was made between the laying on of the hands of the bishop and of the presbyters. In the Second Epistle to Timothy, Paul speaks of the gift of God having been conferred on Timothy through the laying on of his (Paul's) hands.² This may indicate some other gift bestowed on Timothy in connection with the laying on of hands ; or it may mean that Paul himself participated in the laying on of hands spoken of in the first epistle. There is no room whatever for the pretension, that there was any order of official persons in the apostolic churches, who possessed the exclusive power of conferring the gift of God by the laying on of their hands. But most of all, there is the entire absence of any proof that the apostles ordained in the churches a clergy, who derived from that ordination the power to exhibit the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is easy to prove, that they were at great pains to provide for the spiritual care and oversight of the churches which they formed. It is plain that Titus was left in Crete chiefly to provide for that very interest. It is equally obvious that Timothy had a very important charge in the church at Ephesus, and that he was expected to exert in designating the officers of the

¹ Alford's Greek Testament, 1 Tim. iv : 14.

² 2 Tim. i : 6.

church a very important influence, and in inducting them into their offices. More than this these two epistles do not prove in respect to the matter under consideration.

It is also highly probable that the respective charges of Timothy and Titus referred to in these epistles were not permanent, but temporary and exceptional. He who assumes the contrary does so without any warrant. In respect to Titus, such was very certainly and obviously the fact. Paul was hurried away to other fields of labor, and Titus was left behind, to complete certain arrangements which Paul had contemplated, but had not finished. In respect to Timothy, it is highly probable that the same was true, and his charge was only to a particular church. These two epistles therefore afford no ground even for the conjecture, that the apostolic churches were governed by the centralized authority of diocesan bishops.

That centralization of the government of the churches which in after ages subverted the local autonomy of apostolic times resulted very largely from the fact, that the principle was early assumed, that a bishop could only be ordained by bishops. As there was but one bishop in each congregation, it was necessary that the bishops of several congregations should participate in the transaction. This created a necessity for councils of bishops, and these councils soon began not only to claim the exclusive right of ordaining bishops in the several churches, but of exercising a legislative authority over them. Such an episcopate was destructive of local autonomy, but not the episcopate which was recognized by the apostles. Dean Alford has made it plain in a passage just referred to, that such bishops as Paul wrote to Timothy about were ordained by the presbytery of the local church. Such an episcopate was perfectly consistent with local independency.

Another function of the modern diocesan bishop is, by the rite of confirmation, to admit persons to the Lord's Supper. That persons were so admitted to the apostolic churches, and that to admit them was the exclusive function of a diocesan bishop, is an assumption sanctioned by no hint of the apostolic records, and in palpable contradiction to the impression which those records make on the unbiassed reader. I know of no single passage which seems to contain any hint of the existence of such a practice. The Holy Ghost is indeed said to have been conferred by the laying on of the apostles' hands, as in the case of Peter at Samaria.¹ But the Holy Ghost was sometimes given without the laying on of hands, as in the case of the persons assembled at the house of Cornelius. While Peter was yet speaking, he was surprised that the Holy Ghost descended on his hearers.² The principles of interpretation which would make episcopal confirmation out of such examples as these can make anything out of anything. Yet it must be made out of such examples as these, or not derived from the apostolic records. Some may be disposed to claim that another function of diocesan bishops was to authorize men to preach the word and interpret the Scriptures. But such a claim is too obviously groundless to require any argument. The prophetic function came down to the apostolic churches from the ancient dispensation in all its fulness. Particular assemblies of Christians might certainly select for their religious teachers those whom they judged best qualified to promote edification. But this does not hinder that all may, as they have opportunity, speak all the truth of God that is in them ; and the idea of a class in the church exclusively charged with the function of uttering

¹ Acts viii : 17.

² Acts x : 44.

God's truth in this world is in contradiction to the whole tenor and spirit of the religion of the Bible from the days of the patriarchs till now. It is accordant with the ordinances of God in every age in which he has revealed himself to men, that men to whom he has revealed in any way his truth and his will may utter them to any assemblage of their fellow-men that will hear them, whether in the wilderness of Judæa or in the temple at Jerusalem, whether beneath cathedral domes or under the open arch of heaven.

I come therefore to the conclusion that there are in the apostolic records no indications whatever that the churches founded by the apostles were centralized under the government of an order of diocesan bishops. There are not only no traces of the existence of such bishops in those churches, but the functions which they perform, and for which only they exist in modern times, did not exist in the churches of the apostles, and were unknown in those times. The impression that those functions did exist and are recognized in the apostolic records cannot be derived from the records themselves, but has been thrown back upon them and interpreted into them from more recent ages. If any one is shocked at this conclusion, and I am painfully aware that many will be, I entreat such a one, to consider why he is shocked. Is it on account of his reverence for Jesus Christ and the recorded testimony of his apostles, or on account of his veneration for usages and customs which have come down to him from dark and barbarous ages of superstition and spiritual despotism, which the sainted John Robinson, in his celebrated farewell address to the pilgrims of Plymouth, most appropriately called the "depth of anti-Christian darkness"? Can the usages which have come to us from those bad ages be worthy of our attachment and reverence, any further than they agree

with the institutions which the apostles planted? If in any of these pages I have treated apostolic testimony with irreverence, or have misrepresented or misstated it, my readers may well be shocked and indignantly reject my conclusions. But if I have treated those records with reverence, and interpreted them with fairness and candor, let them reserve their indignation for those perversions and misrepresentations which have been foisted upon the sacred record by the superstition of later ages. I for one am determined, by the help of God, to learn what these records teach.

There is then no difficulty in knowing what the Holy Catholic Church was, as it began to exist in the times of the apostles. Its catholicity was not organic and official, but, like everything else which came from Jesus Christ, moral and spiritual. By such ties only was it bound together in an all-pervading and perpetual unity of the Spirit. It was, as Archbishop Whately has described it, in words which cannot be improved, "ONE SCRIPTURAL BROTHERHOOD." It had ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM. The local churches which everywhere existed were "united by the common principles on which they were founded, and by their mutual agreement, affection and respect." They were all earnest believers in the one crucified Christ that was risen from the dead. He was their prophet, priest and king. They accepted his teachings illustrated by his spirit and example, as the obligatory rule of life, and his death and resurrection as their hope of the life everlasting. They gladly observed baptism and the Lord's Supper as badges of their adherence to him in whatever times of persecution and suffering. They were everywhere a peculiar people. Their peculiarity consisted in the fervor of their adherence to the crucified and risen Christ, and in the elevation and purity of their lives.

Their common religious faith bound them to one another in all places, and united them into one world-wide brotherhood. In every community where they were found they were irresistibly drawn together by the strong attractions of their common faith and hope, into peculiar local societies, formed for the purpose of expressing their mutual affection, and becoming as far as possible helpful to each other's comfort and edification. In these societies they assembled themselves together once in every seven days for purposes of instruction and worship, and mutually participating in the breaking of bread in the name of the Lord. The organization of these local societies resulted necessarily from their common faith, affection and hope. They could not but be united in external and visible fellowship with all those living in the same community with themselves, who shared with them such beliefs and hopes.

The whole body of believers everywhere was thoroughly imbued with that spirit of all-embracing philanthropy, which was so pre-eminently characteristic of the Founder. He came to be the Saviour of the world. As such his followers everywhere received him, and their hearts glowed with an intense enthusiasm to communicate the blessings of this salvation to all the world. Hence the spirit of universal propagandism which has been the characteristic of Christianity in every age, and is not less intense in the nineteenth century than in any former age, unless perhaps I ought to except the age of the apostles. In that age the fervor of propagandism was entirely expended in publishing the story of the crucified Christ, his resurrection from the dead and repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name. The kingdom of heaven was not of this world. There was no hierarchy. The believers in different places and countries were

bound together by no administrative bands, and no official functions, but only by faith in the Crucified One, and the common hope of the life eternal. This is the Holy Catholic Church of the apostolic age; and it is incomparably grander than all the pomp and splendor of the government of what is called the church, under popes and patriarchs and bishops and ecumenical councils. These forms and administrations of human device and manipulation may usurp the name of the Holy Catholic Church, but it is only a usurpation. The same that it was in the days of the apostles and as it came from the hand of its Founder, it ever has been, still is, and ever shall be, moral, spiritual, invisible, except as it is manifested by the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the holy doctrine which it proclaims and the holy lives of its members. This is, I repeat it, and ever shall be, the Holy Catholic Church. It ever will be one of the noblest objects of a Christian's faith.

An organic and official catholicity is a chimerical conception which never has been realized and never can be. Rome boasts her catholicity; yet she excludes from her pale millions of the sincere adherents of the faith of Jesus Christ. To pretend that among all those whom she debars from her communion by her high pretensions of ghostly power, none are the accepted followers of Jesus Christ, is the very climax of arrogant absurdity. The same may be said of every other attempt at organic catholicity. It is catholicity which is no catholicity. By insisting on submission to authorities which Jesus never established and to laws which he never enacted, it brands as rebels, it excludes from the pretended kingdom of heaven, multitudes who bear all the characteristics of true discipleship. It unchurches itself, and reveals itself as an anti-Christian combination falsely bearing the name of Christ. The

catholicity of faith and love is not only the primitive catholicity, but it is the only possible catholicity. All else is mere pretension and chimera.

It is an exceedingly strong confirmation of the positions maintained in this chapter, that the word "church" (*ἐκκλησία*) is used in strict conformity with them, whenever religiously applied throughout the New Testament. It is employed in two senses only. In the language of the present it is used in a variety of senses often contradictory to each other, and contradictory to the use of it which prevails throughout the New Testament. This is just what we might expect. Confusion of thought is always indicated by confusion of language. It is difficult for us to conceive how harshly the jargon of modern christendom would have sounded in apostolic ears. The Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Church, the Anglican Church, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, and all the forms of speech which designate the wellnigh innumerable sects of modern christendom, all claiming the honor and dignity of the church of Christ, the kingdom of heaven, would have seemed to the disciples of the first age barbarous and intolerable corruptions of the classic speech of pure Christianity. In that age the word, in its religious use, always meant either the local society of believers united together for mutual fellowship and edification, or else the Holy Catholic Church as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes it, "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven."¹ Here is no confusion of tongues, because no confusion of thought. All is consistent and harmonious in the things that are described, and in the language in which they are expressed.

¹ Hebrews xii : 22, 23.

The time must come again, when the whole multitude of the disciples shall return to the classic language of primitive Christianity. Then the world will know again what Christians mean, and Christians themselves will know what they mean, when they profess their faith in the Holy Catholic Church.

This view of the church in apostolic times would be very incomplete without an inquiry into the internal economy, or, as it is commonly called, the discipline of the independent societies which the apostles organized. It is only within very narrow limits, that these societies can be said to have been voluntary associations. They resulted indeed, not from direct command, but from the conscious wants of devout persons of like faith and hopes. But the persons who united in organizing them were all subjects of the "kingdom of heaven," and were bound by all its laws. They had therefore no right to overlook or disregard one of Christ's "little ones." A selected portion of a Christian community could have no right to organize such a society on such principles as to separate themselves from the rest of their brethren, for the gratification of their own tastes and the indulgence of their own caprices, and to enter into arrangements for social worship and religious edification from which a portion of their brethren were excluded. The kingdom of heaven recognizes no such aristocracy. Every local society of believers was therefore bound to embrace in its membership all the disciples of Christ within its territorial limits. As such societies were in their very nature expressions of mutual confidence, and the recognition of each other as disciples of Christ, the one motive which led to their organization would lead to the exclusion of those who denied Christ either in faith or life, just as it required the inclusion of all true disciples. They could exclude from membership only for

cause, and the only cause which would justify exclusion was disloyalty to Christ. This was the only voluntary element in the reception of members.

On the other hand, it was an obligation, obviously incumbent on every disciple of the Master, to associate himself with his brethren as intimately and permanently as possible, for the purposes of mutual edification and co-operation in the work of the Lord. Here also was a voluntary element. As the church might exclude one, whatever his professions, who obviously did not belong to the Master, so also an individual disciple might refuse to connect himself with a local society which he believed to be disloyal to Christ, whatever high professions it might make ; and might join with others who entertained the same views with himself, in organizing another society in the same community which would be true to Christian truth and duty. But nothing could justify him and his associates in taking such a step, but the fact that the existing so-called church had forsaken Christ.

That the local churches of the apostles did claim the right and recognize the duty of excluding from membership persons who were unfaithful to Christ is clearly indicated in various places. This will be so generally admitted without hesitation that it is quite unnecessary to occupy space by particular quotations. The single example of the incestuous person whom Paul advises the Corinthian church "to deliver unto Satan"¹ will be quite sufficient. There is much disagreement among commentators about what the apostle meant by the words "deliver unto Satan," but there can be no doubt whatever that he meant to advise them to put away that wicked person from their number. The rightful-

¹ 1 Cor. v: 1-5.

ness of this is so obvious that there is really no room for argument on the subject. Any society whatever, if it has a right to exist at all, has a right to exclude those who violate its fundamental law. Civil society exists for the protection of the person, the liberty and the property of every individual, and has no right to deny the benefit of such protection to any individual human being that is loyal to its fundamental principles. But it has a right to exclude from its privileges any individual who lives in violation of those principles. In exactly the same manner the church in any community exists for the edification and spiritual care of the entire brotherhood of Christ, and can have no right to overlook the humblest and feeblest individual; but it has a right to cast out and disown any one who in his life tramples on the fundamental principles of its organization, and discards that faith in Jesus Christ which is the only bond which binds its members together.

How then was the government of these Christian societies related to the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper? Did this unquestioned right to exclude from their membership persons who are obviously disloyal to Christ, imply that these local churches were the divinely constituted guardians of these Christian rites? One would think that to ask the question were to answer it. But many think otherwise, and the question must therefore be examined. It has already been shown, that in apostolic times those rites were not placed under the guardianship of any clergy or priestly corporation. It is another question that now claims our consideration. Were the organized local churches the divinely appointed guardians of these rites? When for example one wished to be baptized in profession of his faith in Christ, must he make his application to some local church to be admitted to that privilege?

Might he not say to the Christian teacher or friend by whom he had been led to Christ, as the eunuch said to Philip, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Does his baptism signify his admission into some local church? Or is it the external sign of his new birth into the one family of Christ? It would surely seem that, in view of the precedents of the New Testament, to ask these questions is to answer them. It cannot be claimed for a moment, that it was necessary to apply to a local church to gain admission to the right of baptism, or that the receiving of it placed one in any peculiar relations with any local church. Baptism belonged, not to the local church, but to the church universal.

How then stands the case in respect to the Lord's Supper? I can have no doubt, that in this respect also the relation of the local church to the church universal is perfectly analogous to that of the synagogue to the Mosaic economy. As the synagogue had no control over any of the rites of Judaism, so the local church, the Christian synagogue, had none over either of the rights of Christianity. Whoever will consult the history of those times¹ will see, that the "breaking of bread" was practised not only when the whole church came together, but from "house to house," that is, wherever the Christians were met for worship. It is also obvious from the same narrative, that the "breaking of bread" took place before there was any organized local church, not only in the upper chamber where it was instituted, but among the multitudinous converts at Jerusalem. The multitude of them that believed not only sealed their acceptance of Jesus by receiving baptism, but by uniting in observing that rite which commemorated his death for their sins, before there

¹ Acts ii: 41-47.

could have been any local church to take part in the matter. There is nothing to create the belief, that after local churches were organized, they took the guardianship of this rite. It continued to be the custom, that wherever a company of Christians were met together, the "breaking of bread and prayers" were parts of their worship, and the church in its corporate capacity exercised no more guardianship over the one than over the other.

But, it is perhaps asked, when the Corinthian church "put away that wicked person from among them," did they not by that act express their conviction that he was an unfit person to join with them in celebrating this rite? Doubtless, and that he was equally unfit to join with them in their prayers or in any other act of worship. It no more implied a guardianship over one than over another. Let us suppose that their prayers were responsive, and that after his exclusion from membership, this person had continued to come into their assembly as before, and had continued to join, perhaps even ostentatiously, in the responses, would they not have been as truly shocked by his conduct as though he had joined with them in the breaking of bread? His exclusion from the society no more implied that he was cut off from one of these modes of worship than from the other. If he had any sense of propriety, he would not join with them in either of these acts of worship, till he had confessed and forsaken his sin. But it would not be because the church exercised any guardianship or control over either of them, but only because he must know that the members of the church would be shocked and pained at his impudent hypocrisy. Chevalier Bunsen says in a remarkable passage, which will be quoted a little further on, that the worship of the early Christians was secret. If this

were true, exclusion from the society would imply exclusion from all their worship. It can be easily shown that in the ages which followed that of the apostles this was true, but it is one of the points in which the churches of the next centuries certainly did very widely deviate from apostolic usage. This will be made to appear in a subsequent chapter. But it is certainly an error to represent the worship of the Christians in apostolic times as secret. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."¹ This renders it certain that according to Paul's understanding of the matter, the worship of the Christians was open to unbelievers and persons unacquainted with the gospel.

As the case stands, there is no evidence at all that the primitive churches exercised any corporate guardianship whatever over the Lord's Supper, to debar unworthy persons from participating in it, more than from joining in their prayers. When Paul is reproofing the Corinthian church for great irregularities in observing it, he speaks not a word of exhortation to caution in the admission of persons to participation in it. The impression is made throughout, that in respect to this as to every other part of worship, the individual was held responsible for his own honesty and sincerity; and there is no

¹ 1 Cor. xiv: 23-25.

intimation that any qualification for the observance of this rite was regarded as requisite, other than an honest wish to honor Christ. We can find no traces of any ecclesiastical barriers erected around it, to protect its sanctity from profanation. No stronger barrier can be devised than to erect over it the banner of the crucified Christ, and, with the authority of truth and sincerity, to insist that to come to that table otherwise than to honor him is a sin against God.

On the supposition that the apostles did regard the local churches in their organic capacity as charged with the duty of keeping guard over the Lord's Supper, to protect it from profanation by the exercise of its authority, it is utterly incredible that the subject should have been left as it is, — no allusion to any such guardianship in the accounts which the evangelists have given of the institution of the rite ; no exhortation in any of the letters of the apostles to particular churches to fidelity in the discharge of such a trust ; even when an apostle is sharply rebuking a particular church for great improprieties in observing the rite, no allusion whatever to any such responsibility of the church for the fitness of those who are permitted to participate in it ; no single example of any case in which a church exercised such a guardianship ; no trace of its recognized existence in all the history of the times. Stronger historic evidence is scarcely possible, that such a guardianship was not instituted by Christ or enjoined by the apostles. Absolutely nothing meets our view in all the literature of the time to indicate that such an institution was ever thought of. It does not belong to that age. It is an invention of later times thrown back upon the apostolic age, and interpreted into the New Testament, not learned by fair interpretation from it.

I am well aware that this conclusion will be very ear-

nestly rejected by many persons whom I regard with sincere and reverential affection. Some of them will not only reject it, but they will be shocked at it, as though it were something impious. But in the name of God I stand by the evidence. The time has fully come when it is a solemn necessity of all Christian people to understand the church of the New Testament. I have sought to put the case precisely as it stands in those only trustworthy primitive records of our faith. No man can deal fairly with those records and present it otherwise. Before I am through with the work I have in hand, it will be my duty to show that by interpreting into the language of the New Testament customs and ideas which the apostles never thought of, and which have no claim on the reverence of a Christian people, the church of God has been fearfully corrupted, and is to-day in every part of christendom filled with confusion, weakness and anarchy.

I close this chapter by quoting in confirmation of most of the views I have taken of the constitution and condition of the apostolic churches, the clearly expressed opinion of a scholar of the highest eminence in this department of literature and criticism. It is as follows:—

“As to the Christian congregations of this period, their members were in the first instance mostly of the lower classes, workingmen, slaves or freedmen. Soon, however, Christianity gained proselytes among the rich and higher classes, at least out of Palestine, particularly among the women. Each congregation was called originally by the same name as their place of worship, a synagogue, of which ‘congregation’ is the Latin translation. Afterwards the Hellenistic expression ‘popular meeting,’ ‘ecclesia,’ became prevalent; the last appellation, taken from the name of the place of worship

(*kyriake*, the house of the Lord), has caused this word to be translated church, kirk, kirche. The Hebrew and Hellenic names have in common the idea of a congregation of people.

Each church was independent of the others ; they were governed by leaders, called by the translated Hebrew name presbyters, that is to say elders, or by the Hellenic name bishops, *episcopi*, that is, superintendents or overseers, inspectors. The apostles acted as the general visitors or advisers of these congregations ; but they did not interfere with their legislative autonomy any more than did the elders or bishops. In all cases the ecclesia was autonomic, sovereign ; the apostles themselves took their place in these assemblies. That autonomy did not produce separation, because the Christian congregations had the spirit of Christ in them. The practice at Jerusalem of a community of goods was, naturally, soon abandoned, because it would have led, if further developed, to mischievous results. "Pray and work" was the watchword. But the principle of brotherhood remained ; the whole fabric of the growing community was based upon mutual brotherly aid and assistance, proceeding from a spirit of thankful love to God. Thus, serving charity, the diaconia became the substitute for police and military command, and foreshadowed the immense unparalleled change which the social state of the world was destined to undergo.

"In this manner, under such leaders, and with such an organization, a chain was formed almost imperceptibly, through all the provinces of the Roman Empire, of secretly (?) worshipping, self-supporting, independent, but sincerely attached societies. . . .

"The first link of that chain was in Jerusalem, from whence it extended itself to Antioch and Babylonia,

and from Syria to every part of Asia Minor, as well as Egypt, and having reached Europe, by way of Macedonia, Achaia, and the isles of the Ægean Sea, it embraced the metropolis of the ancient world a few years before the two princes of the apostles perished there in the Neronian persecutions of the year 65 of our era.”¹

¹ Bunsen's Hippolytus and his Age, Vol. I. p. 29. Reasons have already been assigned for rejecting the statement that the worship of the primitive church was secret.

PART II.

THE TRANSITION CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE RISE OF HIERARCHY.

THUS far the attention of the reader has been constantly directed to the single inquiry, "What was the conception according to which Jesus organized his kingdom in the world?" In the effort to answer this question, information has been exclusively sought from the sayings, the deeds, and in short from the whole history of the manifested Messiah, and from the constitution which his chosen apostles gave to the churches which they organized, as decisively indicating their understanding of the intentions of their Master. There is in the extant apostolic records no lack of material out of which to reconstruct the churches of the apostles, and from which to learn with a high degree of certainty the organic conception of the Founder. The apostolic age is a stage in the history of Christianity which, so far as principles are concerned, is independent and complete in itself, and needs not to be corrected or supplemented by the records of any subsequent ages. Any attempt thus to correct or supplement it is obviously improper and impertinent. The church exists only by

the authority of Jesus Christ. It can have no constitution but that which he gave it. It can have no laws but those which he enacted, unless it can be shown that those laws emanate from some legislative authority which he constituted. Of the origin and constitution of the church the apostles are our only witnesses, and their testimony is only transmitted to us in the records which they have left us. If the constitution of the church in any subsequent age differs from that of the apostolic age, it only shows us that the men who came after the apostles deviated from the divine pattern, and have left us an example which it is improper and unsafe for us to follow.

This examination of the constitution of the apostolic churches was not undertaken, as the reader is already aware, for the gratification of mere curiosity; but for the purpose of bringing before our minds the original conception of the church, in order that we may compare with it the church as it has existed in subsequent ages, and especially as it exists in our own. No man can make such a comparison with fairness and candor without being impressed by the greatness of the contrast which exists between the church of the present and the primitive model. There is no room for any doubt that the church of modern times, under all its variety of constitutions and usages, derives its origin from that of the apostolic age. It cannot therefore be uninteresting or unimportant to inquire through what steps of change, running through a period of eighteen centuries, the church of the apostles has passed into the church of modern christendom. Of course it is not to be expected, that in a work of this size any full account can be given in detail of the progress of those changes which have occurred, and of the causes by which they have been produced. But it seems impor-

tant to the purpose in hand to mark four distinct stages through which the church has passed, in its progress from its primitive condition to the complicated and anarchic religious phenomena of the nineteenth century. These four stages are represented to the mind by the church of the second and third centuries or the ante-Nicene church, the church of the Middle Ages, the Reformation and Protestantism. Each of these stages must be examined in order that we may discern the relation of each to that which preceded and that which followed it. The examination of the first three stages must be confined to a general outline, that of the fourth more detailed and exhaustive. The present chapter will be devoted to the ante-Nicene church.

One cannot enter on such an examination without a feeling of reverence not unmingled even with awe. It was the age of heroic martyrdom. We must not, we cannot forget that it is to the martyr spirit of that age we are indebted for the fact, that the church of Christ has any existence in the nineteenth century. There is reason however to suspect, that that very reverence has sometimes proved injurious to the cause of truth. The suffering which the men of that age endured has seemed to screen them from that criticism to which other ages are always subject. It seems ungrateful to those heroic martyrs to sit in our studies in this age of unbounded religious liberty, a religious liberty which we enjoy as the fruit of their heroic endurance of martyrdom, to call in question their views of Christian doctrine, or their practices in the constitution and government of the church. For this very reason it is and long has been difficult, if not impossible, to assign to the church of that age its proper position in history, and to award to it only its proper influence on the thinking and action of subsequent ages. Reverence

for those heroic men is right, and the absence of it disgraceful. But martyrs however heroic are not therefore inspired teachers and examples to all subsequent ages. We are to judge of those men and their works only as we judge of all other men, by comparing them with the word of the Lord. That they were heroic does not prove that they were infallible. We may reverence the moral greatness of the men, while we fearlessly compare their teachings and their practices with the divine standard, and approve or condemn accordingly. We are under no necessity of adopting their teachings when they contradict the teachings of Jesus, or of following their examples when they are plainly at variance with the example of the apostles.

One cannot become much acquainted with the moral scenery of that age without perceiving, that it is very broadly contrasted with that of apostolic times. To deny that it is so is a palpable manifestation either of ignorance or want of truthfulness. An hour spent in reading Tertullian and Cyprian does not seem much like an hour spent with Luke and Paul, or Peter and John. We feel that we are communing with men of another spirit, and living and moving and having our being in very different systems of thought. We cannot make ourselves believe that the order of things which meets our view in early patristic literature is either identical with that which we find in the apostolic records, or the legitimate product of it. We feel that elements utterly incongruous with primitive Christianity have found their way into the church, and greatly modified both its constitution and its teachings. If the Christian literature of those centuries were generally accessible to the English reader, I should not think it necessary to fortify these assertions by any citation of particular passages. But as such is not the fact, I must

make good my position by giving specimens from the writings of these men. I purpose therefore to prove by quotations from the Christian literature of the second and third centuries the following four propositions:—

1. That the church in those centuries was infected by a ritualistic spirit, which is quite foreign to the times of the apostles.

2. That the church in those centuries invested its officers with authority and power for which we find no warrant in the apostolic records, even making the officers of the church a priesthood, and claiming for them the authority which belonged to the priests and Levites of the old dispensation.

3. That the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper were placed under the exclusive control of this priesthood, and thereby greatly perverted from their original aim.

4. That the church of those centuries was deeply corrupted by the doctrine of celibacy, and interfered with the relations of the sexes otherwise than in the interest of moral purity, and greatly to the injury of domestic morality.

The ritualism of the ante-Nicene church first claims our attention. To avoid the danger of using language indefinitely, it is necessary to define ritualism. By ritualism I mean a worship in which undue importance is attached to external and material conditions, to circumstances of time and place and form, to positions of the body and ceremonial observances. No one acquainted with the Christian literature of the age referred to needs to be told, that in this respect there is a very broad contrast between it and the books of the New Testament. One may be himself a ritualist, and may regard the writings of those early fathers as a great improvement upon those of the apostles, and may persuade himself

that the worship of the primitive church was more ritual than it appears to be ; but he surely cannot deny that such a contrast really exists. But for the benefit of those who have no access to the writings of those early fathers it is necessary to give a few examples.

One of the topics upon which these writers have spoken most copiously is baptism. From Tertullian we have a treatise on this subject of some length. In that treatise we find the doctrine of baptismal regeneration steadily and consistently maintained. It is by baptism that our former sins are washed away, and we are prepared to receive the Holy Ghost. Without any reservation he speaks of the water "By which we are washed from the sins of our former blindness, and set free for eternal life."¹ He has labored through two chapters² to show the natural fitness of water to be the instrument of this purification. He refers in this connection to the spirit of God "moving upon the face of the waters," as emblematical of the use of water in baptism, and of the gift of the Holy Ghost as a consequence of it. He says the act of baptism by which we are immersed in the water is corporeal ; the effect is spiritual, we are released from our sins.³ In the next chapter, and abundantly throughout the treatise, the reception of the Holy Ghost is said to be in consequence of baptism. "Then that most Holy Spirit willingly descends from the Father upon those bodies purified (by baptism) and blessed (by the laying on of hands)."⁴ To give a correct idea of the ritualism, the downright materialism of this writer, it would be necessary to quote the whole treatise, and then there would be no need of spending any more words to prove the greatness of the revolution

¹ De Baptismo, Cap. 1.

³ De Baptismo, Cap. 7.

² Cap. 3 and 4, Paris edition.

⁴ De Baptismo, Cap. 8.

in the direction of ritualism, which took place between the apostles on the one hand and Tertullian on the other.

This revolution did not respect baptism alone, but existed in many other details of worship and life. To prove this I quote the following passage of greater length, describing customs which prevailed in his time, and for which he claims full authority, though he admits that they are sanctioned only by custom and tradition, not being required by any law laid down in Scripture : —

“To begin with baptism, when about to enter the water, in that same place, and also a little before in the church, under the hand of the president, we profess that we renounce the devil, his pomp, and his angels: then we are immersed thrice, pledging somewhat more at large than the Lord appointed in the gospel. Then being taken up” (taken up after the new birth of baptism as a new-born infant is taken up) “we first taste a mixture of milk and honey: and from that day we abstain from the daily bath for a whole week. We take, not from the hands of any other than the presidents, the sacrament of the eucharist commanded by the Lord (to be taken) at meal times, and by all, and also in meetings before daybreak. We make offerings for the dead, and for the martyrs on their anniversary day. We think it wrong to fast, or to worship on our knees on the Lord’s day. We glory in the same immunity from the day of the Passover to the Pentecost. It would be painful to us that any portion of the wine or the bread, even though our own, should be dropped on the ground. At every advance and movement, at every coming in and going out, on putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, on lighting the lamps, at our seats, at our beds, whatever conversa-

tion occupies us, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross."¹

It surely needs no argument to prove that this is not the moral scenery of apostolic times. The thought can hardly fail to suggest itself even here, that it is the moral scenery of after ages of superstition and spiritual despotism. Tertullian lived between the years 160 A. D. and 240 A. D. From Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who suffered martyrdom in the year 258, I make the following extracts: "It is manifest where and by whom that remission of sins can be given which is given in baptism."² He argues that it is given in and by the church and not by heretics. Throughout the whole treatise from which this quotation is made, the writer steadily and consistently argues, that the church has and heretics have not the power of purifying men from sin by administering to them the rite of baptism. The church in Cyprian's time was greatly agitated by the question, whether persons coming to the church after having been baptized by heretics ought to be rebaptized. He very strenuously maintained the affirmative, and it is chiefly in arguing on this question, that his view of baptism itself is expressed. From one of these arguments I quote the following: "For since there cannot be two baptisms, if the heretics truly baptize they have the (one true) baptism. And he who presents to them from his authority this countenance yields to them and consents that an enemy and adversary of Christ may seem to have the power of washing and purifying and sanctifying a man."³ It is plain that the power here spoken of is the power of baptism. In the same letter he says "that they who are not in the

¹ De Corona, Cap. 3, Paris édition.

² De Hereticis Baptizandis, Cap. 7, Paris édition.

³ Epis. 71, Paris édition.

church of Christ are reckoned among the dead, nor can another be brought to life by him who is not himself alive, since there is one church which has obtained the grace of eternal life, and lives eternally and gives life to the people of God." According to the view of Cyprian a man must be brought to life, that is born again, by baptism, and it is by baptism that the church gives life to the people of God. As natural life dates from birth, so the new life dates from the new birth or baptism. This mode of argument is repeated by Cyprian times almost without number.

I give the following quotation from the church and house book of the ancient Christians, on the authority of Chevalier Bunsen, as of uncertain origin indeed, but undoubtedly belonging to the age about which we are inquiring. It has reference to the administration of baptism to catechumens who have accomplished the required course of preparatory training, which generally occupied three years, at least in the church at Alexandria.

IX. *How the water is to be prepared and the general order of baptism.*

And at the time of the crowing of the cock, let them first pray over the water. Let the water be drawn into the font or flow into it. And let it be thus, if they have no scarcity. But if there be a scarcity, let them pour the water which shall be found into the font; and let them undress themselves, and the young shall be first baptized. And after the adult men have been baptized, at last the women, having loosed all their hair, and having laid aside their ornaments of gold and silver which were on them. Let not any one take a strange garment with him into the water. (Copt. Can. b. II. 46.)

X. *How the oil for the anointing is prepared.*

And at the time which is appointed for the baptism let the bishop give thanks over the oil, which, putting into a vessel, he shall call the oil of thanksgiving. Again, he shall take the other oil, and exorcising over it, he shall call it the "oil of exorcism." And a deacon shall bear the oil of exorcism, and stand on the left hand of the presbyter. Another deacon shall take the oil of thanksgiving, and stand on the right hand of the presbyter. (Copt. Can. b. II. 45.)

XI. *How they are to renounce Satan and be anointed: and then say the creed.*

And when the presbyter has taken hold of each one of those who are about to receive baptism, let him command him to renounce, saying: "I will renounce thee, Satan, and all thy service, and all thy works," and when he has renounced all these, let him anoint him with the oil of exorcism, saying: "Let every spirit depart from me." And let the bishop or the presbyter receive him thus undressed, to place him in the water of baptism. Also let the deacon go with him into the water and let him say to him, helping him that he may say: "I believe in the only true God, the Father Almighty, and in his only begotten son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit, the quickener."

And let him who receiveth baptism repeat after all these: "I believe thus." And he who bestoweth it shall lay his hand upon the head of him who receiveth, dipping him three times, confessing these things each time. And afterwards let him say again: "Dost thou believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, the only son of God, the Father; that he became man in a wonderful manner for us, in an incomprehensible unity, by his Holy Spirit, of Mary the Holy Virgin, without the seed of man, and that he was crucified for us under Pontius

Pilate, and died of his own will for our redemption, and rose on the third day, loosing the bands of death ; that he ascended up into heaven, and sate on the right hand of his good Father on high, and that he cometh again to judge the living and the dead at the appearing of him and his kingdom? And dost thou believe in the Holy good Spirit, and quickener, who wholly purifieth in the Holy Church ? ” Let him again say : “ I believe.”¹ (Copt. Can. b. II. 46.)

In another section we find very detailed directions for giving the eucharist to those who have been newly baptized, followed with a mixture of milk and honey, which they are to receive as an emblem of the promise, “ I will give you a land flowing with milk and honey.”²

It is not necessary perhaps to make any further quotations in proof of the ritualism of the ante-Nicene church. It is not agreeable to make such quotations, and they will not be pleasant reading to many for whose eyes they are intended. It is sufficient if I have quoted enough to present the strange contrast which meets us on passing from the apostolic records, to the extant writings of the leading men of the ages that immediately followed. It certainly is important to a correct understanding of the subject we are considering, that the greatness of this contrast should be fully appreciated. In the apostolic records everywhere the spirit is everything, the external form and manner nothing. In these writings the most minute circumstances of external form are magnified into matters of importance. For example, in Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus, we are unable to ascertain by what act the baptism was

¹ Hip. and his Age, Vol. II. pp. 16-18.

² Hip. and his Age, Vol. II. p. 19. See also Hip. and his Age, Vol. II. pp. 64-66.

performed. "And Jesus, when he was baptized went up straightway out of the water"; but whether Jesus was plunged into the water, or the water was poured upon him, the narrative does not inform us. If any one says that that information was conveyed by the word "baptize," I answer, I cannot so understand it. John the Baptist said to his hearers, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear, he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." This undoubtedly refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost with the appearance of tongues of flame on the day of Pentecost. This certainly was not a dipping into, but a pouring upon. Who shall tell us then which of these actions it was which John performed upon Jesus in the water of Jordan? We are informed that the water was applied as an emblem of moral purity. But in the rubrics for the administration of baptism in these documents of the early church, how minute and often how puerile are the details which are insisted on! The number of times the acts shall be performed, the dressing and the undressing, the exorcism, the anointing from head to foot with oil, the removal of any ornaments which women might wear, and many other minutiae which it is not necessary to particularize. Here is a tendency to materialize and externalize worship, which is utterly foreign to the spirit of the New Testament.

There is no foundation whatever for assuming, that these things are a natural development of anything in the teaching or lives of Jesus or his apostles. They evidently came in upon the church from the spirit of the age, from that very condition of society and opinion which essentially disqualified the men of that age to appreciate either Jesus or his doctrine. They are the products of that "mystery of iniquity" which Paul saw

already working. Nor is there any difficulty at all in discerning the causes of this mischief. The whole tendency of the Jewish people was to substitute the ceremonial for the moral and spiritual, the sign for the thing signified. The prophets often rebuked this tendency with great severity, and with that fervid eloquence in which they were pre-eminent over most other men.¹ Whenever Judaism was corrupted it was always in this direction. In the age of which we are writing it was fatally corrupted. It tithed mint, anise and cummin, and omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith. For a pretence it made long prayers, while it devoured widows' houses.² It carefully cleansed the outside, while moral pollution defiled all within. Vast numbers of converts to Christianity were drawn in every country from this corrupted Judaism. From this source it could not but be, that there should be a large incoming of tendencies to materialize and ritualize the worship of the Christian communities.

Still more powerfully did the immemorial usages and ideas of the prevailing paganism tend to corrupt the church in the same direction. No one at all acquainted with the paganism of that age can need to be informed, that its worship was almost purely ceremonial, with scarcely a moral element. Ritualism and materialism were inwrought into its very essence. A Gentile convert could scarcely conceive it possible, that a religious rite such as baptism or the Lord's Supper could be observed with the grand simplicity which is everywhere found in the New Testament. The mode of observance must be prescribed by a rubric which should enter into its minutest details. Such was the fact with all the religious ceremonies to which they had been accustomed

¹ Isaiah, chap. i; also chap. lviii.

² Matt. chap. xxiii.

in their pagan worship ; and the human mind, unless deeply imbued with the exalted moral conceptions of Christianity, always attaches sacredness to the forms under which acts of worship are performed. It is impossible to conceive that there should not have been a very powerful tendency to reduce the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper to a prescribed rubric, and to add from time to time new ceremonials, adapted to the taste and conformed to the immemorial usages of a pagan population. If, for example, a great movement were to occur in favor of Christianity in the empire of China, and many millions of its people should within two or three generations be gathered into Christian churches, and these churches were left for subsequent ages with no influence from the rest of the Christian world, to develop according to their own tendencies, and grow from their own roots, the immemorial ideas and usages of pagan China would exert an exceedingly important and disastrous influence on the development. These tendencies would manifest themselves under the eyes of the original missionaries ; and as soon as the last of them was gone, would in all probability rapidly corrupt the whole structure of Christian society.

This is precisely what did take place in the first ages of Christianity. Under such influences the rapid corruption of Christianity was inevitable. To have prevented the growth of ritualism in the early church would have required a constant exertion of miraculous powers no less conspicuously than they were employed in originating Christianity, and in qualifying the apostles for their divine mission. If any one is disposed to ask why that miraculous power did not continue to be exerted, I answer that one might just as well ask why a miraculous revelation of religion is not made to all men in all countries and ages, and thus the growth of

superstition in the world rendered impossible. These are questions which the human intellect cannot compass. It is wisdom for us to receive things as they are, rather than to dictate to the Supreme Ruler of the universe how they should be. It is certain that if Christianity was given to the world by a miraculous revelation, and left to be developed without further miraculous interposition, it must have been corrupted as it was, and ritualism must have been one of the forms of corruption. It is the glory of Christianity, not that it was attended by a perpetual exertion of supernatural power to render its corruption impossible, but that its moral forces gained such a hold on human society, that that corruption could not be perpetual; that its reformatory power would sooner or later make itself felt, and secure the realization of the moral conception of its founder. This is our hope in dealing with any corruptions of Christianity which still exist. There is a reforming power in the Christ of the New Testament, which, in the course of the ages, will surely prove itself irresistible.

The attention of the reader is next invited to the proposition, that the church in those centuries invested its officers with authority and power for which we find no warrant in the apostolic writings, even making the officers of the church a priesthood, and claiming for them the authority which belonged to the priests and Levites of the old dispensation.

It is, I think, evident that the progress of this change was gradual though rapid. Clement of Rome seems to have been in part contemporary with the apostles and personally acquainted with Paul. He is the reputed author of two epistles to the church of the Corinthians which are extant. The genuineness of at least the first of these is generally conceded. In this epistle he uses

language, certainly in some instances, in such a manner as to show that the words "presbyter" and "bishop" were still used interchangeably after the manner of the apostles.¹ In the same connection however he insists on the authority and honor due to church officers, and emphasizes the fact that they were constituted by the apostles, in such a way as to indicate, that a change was already in progress in the relation of church officers to their charges. The youth of Ignatius joins upon the old age of the apostle John. He suffered martyrdom by being thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre at Rome by the command of Trajan. Seven epistles of his remain, believed to be genuine, though not without suspicion of interpolation. In one of these written to the Trallians,² he clearly marks the distinction of three orders in the ministry. In his epistle to Polycarp³ the same distinction is insisted on, with earnest exhortation to honor and obey church officers according to the rank and dignity of each. The churches however still continued to be independent local societies, and the bishop was only the presiding officer of a particular church with its presbytery and deacons. The distinction of three grades in the ministry seems to have originated in Asia Minor and not at Rome. It was such a gradation of official rank as might be adopted in a Congregational church without essentially modifying its constitution. It must be admitted however that if the epistles of Ignatius are genuine, he claimed a dignity and authority for the office of bishop, which foreshadowed the great changes which were soon to follow. The following specimen should not be omitted: "Let the laity be in subjection to the deacons, the deacons to the presbyters, the presbyters to

¹ Cap. XLIV., Paris edition. ² Cap. II. and III. ³ Cap. VI.

the bishop, the bishop to Christ, even as Christ is to the Father."¹

The following is from Clement of Alexandria: "Since according to my opinion, the grades here in the church of bishops, presbyters, deacons, are imitations of the angelic glory and of that economy which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who, following in the footsteps of the apostles, have lived in perfection of righteousness according to the gospel."²

When we come to such writers as Tertullian and Cyprian, it is useless to occupy space with particular quotations. Their recognition of a clerical hierarchy in three orders is as distinct and abundant as can be found in the writers of subsequent ages. It gives color to everything they ever wrote. They constantly speak of the clergy as a priesthood, divinely appointed and constituted, as the priesthood of the old dispensation was. They speak of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice. Councils of bishops or bishops and presbyters were often assembled, and enacted regulations for the government of the churches in whole provinces. The government of the church became much more centralized in subsequent ages, but loftier claims were scarcely ever made in behalf of the authority of the clergy. It is only necessary to say, that if any one wishes further evidence of the truth of these assertions, he can certainly obtain it, if he possesses a competent knowledge of Latin, by spending a few hours in reading Cyprian's letters, or Tertullian's "Treatise on Baptism." He will even find the ecclesiastical interpretation of the primacy of Peter fully recognized and accepted.

The following, which I give on the authority of Chevalier Bunsen, is in perfect harmony with the preceding:

¹ Ep. ad Smymneaeos, Cap. IX. ² Stromata Liber, VI. Cap. 13.

*“General Definitions of the Peculiar Right and Power of
the Different Members of the Clergy.*

“The bishop blesseth, but is not blessed. He ordaineth, layeth on hands upon men, putteth on the oblation, receiveth the blessing from the bishop, but not from the presbyters. The bishop anathematizeth (excludeth) every clergyman who deserveth to be anathematized (excluded); but to another bishop he is without the power to do this alone.

“A presbyter also blesseth and receiveth the blessing from his fellow-presbyter and from the bishop; and he likewise giveth it to his fellow-presbyter. He layeth his hands on men, but he doth not ordain, neither doth he anathematize. He putteth out those who are under him; and if there are any deserving of punishment, let him give it them.

“A deacon doth not bless, neither doth he give the blessing, but he receiveth it from the bishop and the presbyter. He doth not baptize, neither doth he put on the eucharist. But when the bishop and the presbyter have set on the eucharist the deacon giveth the cup, not as a priest, but as one who ministereth to the priest. There is no power in any other of the clergy to do the work of a deacon.

“And a deaconess doth not bless, neither doth she do any of those things which the presbyters and deacons do, but she keepeth the doors only, and ministereth to the presbyters at the time of the baptism of women, because this is becoming.

“A deacon can put out the subdeacon, and the readers and the singer and the deaconess, if occasion leads him, no presbyter indeed being there. A subdeacon has no power to put out a reader, or a singer, or a

deaconess, or a lay person, for he is a minister to the deacons.”¹

The churches also, though still retaining something of the independence of the first age, were beginning to yield in some important respects to a centralized government under bishops. Bishops were still officers, not of many congregations, but of one. They were also selected for the office by the voice of the brotherhood of their own congregations. But a bishop could only be ordained by two or three bishops, and as there was only one bishop in each congregation, the ordination of a bishop necessitated the co-operation of the bishops of several other congregations. In proof of this I cite the following:—

“Additional Ordinance as to the Case of a Bishop ordained by one Bishop only.

“It is necessary that the bishop should be ordained by three or two bishops; but if one bishop hath ordained him, let him be anathematized. But if a necessity hath happened to any one that he should be ordained by one only, because they are not able to gather together on account of the persecution which is without, or on account of any other such like cause, let the permission from many other holy bishops be received for doing this which is requisite for him.”²

A national primacy was already established and recognized among the bishops. In proof I quote the following:—

“The bishops of every nation ought to know who is first among them, and him they ought to esteem their

¹ Ihip. and his Age, Vol. II. p. 41.

² The Church and House Book, Can. 72. Ihip. and his Age Vol. II. p. 40.

head, and not to do any great thing without his consent, but every one to manage only the affairs that belong to his own parish, and the country places and villages subject to it. But let him not either do anything without the consent of all ; for it is by this means that there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified by Christ in the Holy Spirit.”¹

“Let a synod of bishops be held twice in a year, and let them ask one another the doctrines of piety, and let them determine the ecclesiastical disputes that happen. Once in the fourth week of Pentecost, and again on the twelfth of the month Hyperberetacus, that is, according to the Romans, on the fourth before the Ides of October.”²

If any one will candidly ponder these extracts, and many more which might be made to the same purpose, it seems to me he will admit without hesitation, that the constitution of the church indicated in them is certainly to be regarded, not as supplemental to the constitutions of the apostles, but as in strong and decisive contrast to them. Why do these arrangements of the ages immediately subsequent to the apostles distinctly provide for the election of a clergy, and for inducting them into their respective offices? Why do they arrange them in three distinct orders and accurately define the qualifications and functions of each order? Why are the names descriptive of each order employed with undeviating accuracy, and never interchanged with one another? Evidently because the exhibition of the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper had become a purely clerical function, and because the clergy provided for

¹ The Ecclesiastical Canons of the Apostles, Can. 35. I lip. and his Age, Vol. II. p. 83.

² The same, Can. 38. The same, p. 83.

the performance of this function existed in three distinct orders, so that the function of any one order could not be performed by any other order. The definitions and the names accurately describe the things which really existed. Nothing of the sort is found in the apostolic records, only because the clerical function as it existed in the after age did not exist, and had never been thought of, and was therefore neither defined nor named. The constitutions of the after age are composed of a set of ideas which were a novelty in the church, the introduction of which had essentially modified the arrangements of the apostles, though it had not yet entirely overturned them. No mode of criticism can be more groundless and unphilosophical than that which looks to these documents of the after age, either for a model of the apostolic church or of the church of the future. It seems to me that the mind is strangely warped and distorted, that can pass from the study of the New Testament to these documents of the subsequent ages, without feeling that he has undergone a change of moral climate analogous to that of being transferred from the glorious sunshine of Italy to the fogs and mists and storms of the Arctic Circle.

The next proposition to which the reader's attention is invited is, that the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper were placed under the exclusive control of a priestly corporation, and thereby greatly perverted from their original aim.

Sufficient proof of this proposition has perhaps been already given incidentally in discussing the previous proposition. Excommunication meant exclusion from the Lord's Supper. The power to excommunicate belonged to the priesthood alone, primarily only to the bishop. Presbyters could only be qualified to offer the sacrifice of the eucharist by the laying on of the hands

of the bishop, and through bishops and presbyters only could the laity (the "plebs," as they are significantly called) be admitted to "communicate," or in other words to receive the Lord's Supper.

How great this deviation is from apostolic usage is abundantly apparent from what was said of the absence of any priestly function or priestly name in the apostolic churches. It may be said perhaps that this is a mere change of words, without implying any change of things. But I reply that such a change of phraseology is an unfailing indication of a corresponding change of things. The language employed in the canons of the subsequent ages is necessitated by the things which existed, and accurately describes them. The clergy was a priesthood. The essential idea of a priesthood is that of mediation between God and the rest of mankind. The priestly function is that by which the men who exercise it become a medium of approach to God, by the intervention of which sinning, sorrowing humanity obtains help from God not otherwise obtainable. In the churches of that age the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, especially the latter, were increasingly regarded as divinely appointed media, through which alone men could obtain the most important blessings from God. To these fountains of divine mercy, men could only gain access through the clergy. The order of men through whom alone the people could gain access to those fountains was in the highest sense a priesthood. They were fitly and most appropriately called priests, because they performed or were believed to perform the gravest of priestly functions. The words "priests," "priesthood," "sacerdotal office," came into those churches by a necessary law of language, because the things were there.

On the other hand, the only reason which can be

assigned why such phraseology does not occur in the language of the New Testament is, that there were no ideas or usages in that age which required and justified its use. To throw these ideas backwards upon the age of Christ and his apostles, and read them between the lines of the New Testament, because we find them existing in a later and more superstitious age, is in the last degree unphilosophical, and unjust to our religion and its founder. Especially is this true since there is no difficulty whatever in discovering sources from which these ideas are likely to have come, having no connection with the apostles. On these sources it is not necessary to enlarge after what was said in relation to the ritualizing tendencies of the early church. A Greek or Roman pagan could not conceive of a religious observance or a religion without priestly manipulation. Finding in Christianity when he embraced it the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, he would regard them as sadly lacking that flavor of sanctity, which was in his mind inseparably associated with priestly functions; and he would very naturally seek to render their exhibition more solemn and imposing by committing them to a priestly class, and observing them according to a priestly rubric. The ideas in which he had been educated would predispose him to that materialistic interpretation of our Lord's words, "this is my body," and "this is my blood," which has cast a deep shade of superstition over so large a portion of the history of the church,—a shade which still beclouds the minds of a large majority of those who at this time bear the Christian name. Those words of Christ are frequently used in these very documents with a certain emphasis, which strongly favors the suspicion, that something of this materialistic construction was already gaining possession of the mind of the church. The liturgy in use,

in its relations to this subject, would certainly require little change to accommodate it to the gross materialism of the Middle Ages.

It only remains to present the evidence which justifies the assertion that the church of those ages was deeply corrupted by ascetic ideas of celibacy, and interfered with the relations of the sexes otherwise than in the interest of moral purity, and greatly to the injury of domestic virtue. As we study the literature of that age we are almost constantly inspired with sentiments of reverence and awe, as we walk among moral scenery in which persecution and martyrdom are always the most conspicuous objects; and it is no pleasant task to point out follies and grievous errors of those holy men, and vices of the age which inevitably resulted from those errors. But the purpose I have in view cannot be accomplished without determining the relations of that age with impartial justice to primitive Christianity on the one hand, and to the churches of the following ages on the other. The anti-Nicene church cannot be regarded as the completely developed model of the true church of Christ, of which the apostolic church is only an imperfect and rudimentary form, without doing the greatest injustice to what went before it and what followed after it. We cannot fix its true place in history without clearly indicating the greatness of the contrast, which is apparent on almost every page of its literature, between it and the primitive church. This contrast cannot be fairly exhibited if we omit all mention of that deepest of all the stains which disfigure it, its doctrine of celibacy. No devout writer of the present age can attempt to speak the truth on this subject without deep regret. The Christian world is not prepared to accept an undisguised utterance on this subject, without administering a frown of rebuke to the audacious writer who

attempts such an exhibition. Such a rebuke is uncalled for and unmerited. We shall never know the true history of the church of Christ, till we are willing that even this martyr age should be seen as it really was,—an age of great virtue indeed, but also of such follies and vices that, in the construction of the churches of the present and the future, we have more reason to shun than to imitate its example. I claim therefore a patient and respectful hearing, while I draw aside the veil a little way, and only a little way, in respect to the subject now under consideration. I first invite attention to the following extract from Cyprian, premising that by virgins he means those who had bound themselves by vows of perpetual celibacy and chastity.

“My discourse is now to the virgins, for whom my care is the greater in proportion as their glory is more eminent. That is the flower of ecclesiastical growth, the beauty and ornament of spiritual grace, the glad temper, the entire and incorrupted work of praise and honor, the image of God corresponding to the sanctity of the Lord, the more illustrious portion of the flock of Christ. The glorious fruitfulness of the mother church rejoices through these, and in these abundantly flourishes; and the more a copious virginity adds to its number, so much the more the joy of the mother increases.” A few lines further down he proceeds, “Nor indeed is this caution and fear vain and useless which provides the way of safety, which guards the divine and vital precepts, so that they who have consecrated themselves to Christ, and retiring from carnal concupiscence as much in flesh as in spirit, have vowed to God, may consummate their work, nor any more desire to be ornamented or to please any one except

their Lord, from whom they look for the reward of virginity."¹

A very simple method may be suggested by which any one acquainted with the Latin language may become entirely convinced that Cyprian wrote at a time and in a community deeply imbued with the doctrine of ascetic celibacy; and that he himself accepted that doctrine and advocated it with great enthusiasm. That method is to turn to the word "virgines" in any good index of his writings, and run the eye along the several topics embraced under it. I have such an index before me. In it I find such phraseology as the following, "virgins consecrated to Christ," "chaste virgins persevering are the equals of the angels of God," "they already possess the glory of the resurrection," "the reward of the virgins," "the praise of virginity," "Christ the Lord and head of the virgins," "the Lord does not command but exhorts to virginity." Many of the topics which occur under that word I have omitted only because delicacy forbids me to express them in plain English. On turning to the various passages referred to in the index, they would be found to contain evidence the most unquestionable, that the doctrine of the superior sanctity of a state of celibacy as compared with married life was as fully adopted and as earnestly advocated by Cyprian as by any Christian writer of any age, and that the practices of the church were thoroughly conformed to it; that young persons of both sexes were most earnestly invited and urged to consecrate themselves to such a life, as securing to them a degree of honor and dignity in the church of God and of glory and blessedness in the future life, to which the married could never attain, and that great numbers yielding to

¹ De Habitu Virginum, III. et IV., Paris edition.

such persuasions were professing to lead such a life. The evidence is also sorrowfully abundant, that these doctrines and professions were already abundantly producing those bitter fruits which must always be expected from such violations of nature and of the ordinances of God. Licentious practices did prevail to an alarming degree among these professors of peculiar sanctity. Cyprian deplored this state of things, and was sensible of the great dangers to which young persons in such circumstances were exposed. He earnestly sought to apply a remedy, but his zeal for the superior sanctity of a state of celibacy was such, that he never thought for a moment of remedying the evil by returning to the law and order of nature, but only sought to prevent it by placing the virgins under a more stringent discipline. These assertions cannot be made good by quotations without wearying the reader, and disgusting him with the indelicacy of the subject. If any one wishes further evidence he can easily obtain it, for the writings of this author are accessible in the English language.¹

To the following quotation it is proper to call particular attention. Addressing the virgins he says, "You have already begun to be what you shall be hereafter. You are already in possession in the present life of the glory of the resurrection, you are passing through this life without contracting any of its contagion. While you are persevering virgins and chaste, you are equal to the angels of God."²

Tertullian also furnishes evidence sadly abundant of the prevalence of the same doctrine. He is more cautious than Cyprian. He seeks to avoid any appear-

¹ Epi. LXII. Col. 375,376, Paris edition. Liber de Habitu Virginum, XXXIII. Col. 475,476.

² Idem, XXXII. Col. 475.

ance of condemning or disparaging marriage. He wrote very largely against second marriages and represents them, if not as immoral, certainly as disgraceful and degrading. He wrote a letter to his wife of the dimensions of a considerable book, the sole object of which was to dissuade her from a second marriage in case she should survive him. His whole argument proceeds upon the assumption that all marriage, though permitted on account of the weakness of human nature, implies a certain loss of sanctity. He constantly recognizes a sanctity which is quite distinct from moral purity, if I may so say, a corporeal or material sanctity, which is yet eminently pleasing to God. It is in the interest of such sanctity chiefly that he dissuades from second marriages. The same notion of sanctity is abundantly found in other portions of his writings. It is exceedingly difficult to make particular quotations which will fairly represent the spirit of his writings in relation to this subject. Perhaps nothing better can be done than to give in English the following sentence, and transfer to the margin of the page the passage from which it is taken. Speaking of certain women whose husbands had died before them, and who had remained unmarried for the sake of a higher sanctity, he says, "Thus they gained possession of the everlasting good of the Lord, and by not marrying now in this world they are reckoned of the angelic family."¹

¹ Et tu adversus consilia hæc ejus, adhibe sororum nostrarum exempla, quarum nomina penes Dominum, quæ nullam formæ vel ætatis occasionem præmissis maritis sanctitati anteponunt: malunt enim Deo nubere, Deo speciosæ, Deo sunt puellæ: cum illo vivunt, cum illo sermocinantur: illum diebus et noctibus tractant: orationes suas velut dotes Domino assignant: ab eodem dignationem velut munera maritalia, quotiescunque desiderant, consequuntur. Sic æternum sibi bonum Domini occupaverunt, ac jam in terris non

It is not necessary to weary the reader's patience or shock his taste with more quotations on this disagreeable and painful subject. Perhaps it would have been wiser to have disposed of the whole subject by referring to a single work of one of the most eminent English authors of the present century, Isaac Taylor's "Ancient Christianity." His is deservedly an admired and honored name in our religious literature; but this work is not unfrequently referred to with some degree of bitterness and even contempt. No good reason for so treating it is apparent. It has never been shown that its representations are unfair or untrue. It has been treated with severity only because there is a very large and influential party in christendom, to the adherents of which, the truths which he has uttered are unpalatable and unwelcome. If men have a theory of the church which requires them to accept the Nicene or the ante-Nicene church as the perfected model of that which Jesus founded, such a work as that above referred to will not be a very welcome contribution to our religious literature. But no man who has candidly read the work can say, that its spirit is not devout and reverential, or that the author has not made good his position, that the church of those early ages was as deeply imbued with the ascetic doctrine of celibacy as any portion of Christian history.

nubendo, de familia angelica deputantur. Talium exemplis fœminarum ad æmulationem te continentix exercens, spiritali affectione carnalem illam concupiscentiam humabis; temporalia et volatica desideria formæ vel ætatis inimicantium honorum compensatione delendo. Liber I. Ad Uxorem. Opera Omnia Tertulliani, Tom. I.

The reader desirous of more information concerning Tertullian's views of this subject should consult, in addition to that already referred to, Liber de Velandis Virginibus, Liber de Exhortatione Castitatis and Liber de Monogamia.

No devout Christian, certainly no sincere Protestant, can contemplate this fact without great sorrow. But there is no good reason why any one should feel that utter sickness of heart in respect to it which many manifest, as though to admit it to be true were to surrender the very citadel of our faith. No such inference legitimately follows. Two considerations in respect to it should not be for one moment lost sight of. Such a state of things is not the legitimate product of the teachings or example either of Jesus or the apostles; and causes existed outside of the church, from which just such a development not only should have been expected, but was wellnigh inevitable.

There are certain allusions to the subject of marriage in the New Testament which some have claimed to be the origin from which this doctrine of celibacy is logically derived. It is necessary that these should be examined. The first and perhaps the most important of them is our Lord's answer to his disciples, when they objected to the stringency of his teachings respecting divorce. "If the case of the man," said they, "be so with his wife, it is not good to marry."¹ The answer of Jesus no further discountenances marriage or commends celibacy than by admitting, what certainly no wise man would deny, that one may sometimes properly abstain from marriage for the sake of greater efficiency in promoting the kingdom of God, "for the kingdom of heaven's sake." The same subject is discussed by Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians.² The teachings of Paul are, I think, precisely coincident with those of Jesus himself, in the passage above referred to. No candid interpretation can find in that chapter any commendation of celibacy, as a state of peculiar sanctity.

¹ Matt. xix: 9-12

² I Cor. vii.

That idea is not, I am persuaded, of Scriptural origin. One cannot well read the chapter in question, with a sound and healthy mind and heart without admiring the sober and robust views of the apostle, on a subject upon which there is so much in ancient literature which is morbid. It is impossible to point out in it any trace of the doctrine of the superior sanctity of unmarried life, or any intimation that marriage is a degradation. If any one will compare what Paul says of marriage with the volumes which Tertullian and Cyprian have written on the subject, he can hardly fail to perceive, that the two things compared have nothing in common. The apostle does indeed advise abstinence from marriage under certain conditions, but the reasons which he assigns are altogether personal and prudential, not general. He knew nothing of the "holy virgins," nothing of the equality of those living in celibacy to the angels, nothing of the glorious rewards of virginity. All this is patristic, not Pauline. He saw in marriage and the purities of married life the only safeguard of ordinary humanity against the temptations to degrading vice to which it is exposed, and in great plainness of speech recommends its adoption. His view of second marriages is worthy of particular notice, as in very strong contrast with those of the writers of subsequent ages. Instead of uttering one word in disparagement of them, he explicitly declares, that the woman whose husband is dead "is at liberty to be married to whom she will." In short no one could ever see ascetic celibacy in this chapter, unless his mind was already imbued with it from other sources.

It is probable that the fact that among the qualifications for an overseer of the church as given by Paul, he recommends that he should be the "husband of one

wife,"¹ and that in speaking of those who should be enrolled as widows to be supported by the church, he mentions as one of the requisites, "having been the wife of one man,"² has really exerted a greater influence on the question than any other allusion to the subject in the New Testament. If any one will consult commentators of reputation on these passages, he will find very considerable diversity of opinion as to their meaning. Whether the apostle intends to condemn polygamy or the having of more than one wife at the same time, or a second marriage after the dissolution of the first by death, or to insist on marriage as a necessary qualification for holding office in the church, is not entirely clear. And between these three opinions commentators are divided. The requirement in respect to the widow — that she must have been the wife of one man — seems to admit only of the interpretation that she must have been but once married. And yet this interpretation is by no means free from difficulty. If Paul meant to say that a woman by contracting a second marriage would render herself unworthy of the care and support of the church in case of a second widowhood, how does it happen that he says in this very chapter, "I will, therefore, that the younger women" (meaning as the connection clearly shows younger widows) "marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully"? If he regarded second marriages as in such a sense degrading as to bring a woman under such a disqualification to receive the care and sympathy of the church, he would surely have reminded them of it, and dissuaded them from incurring it. Cyprian would certainly never have allowed such an occasion to pass without at least suggesting

¹ 1 Tim. iii : 2 ; Titus, i, 6.

² 1 Tim. v : 9.

"the sanctity" of continence. It is plain Paul knew nothing of any such sanctity, or he would have suggested it. This consideration is all the more forcible from the fact that, as already shown, the same apostle in writing to the Corinthians had, in the most unqualified manner, asserted the liberty of a woman to contract a second marriage "with whom she will, only in the Lord." Strange liberty this, to do that by which she would render herself unworthy of the sympathy of the church in her widowhood!

This consideration is decisive to prove, that whatever be the true interpretation of these phrases, they cannot have been intended to discountenance and disparage second marriages. If Paul meant to advise that persons having been twice married should not be appointed to office in the church, it must have been for some other reason than disapprobation of such marriages. One commentator of good repute suggests that the emphasis of Paul's instructions in reference to the qualifications of bishops or presbyters should be largely placed on the one first mentioned, "blameless," or without reproach, and that this suggests the true reason for what immediately follows, "the husband of one wife." He shows by quotations from ancient literature that in that age, to have contracted more than one marriage was regarded as disgraceful, as indicating a character too much under the influence of sensual appetite. He thinks that the apostle advised that men who had been more than once married should not be appointed to office in the church, because such appointments would impair the respectability of the church in a community in which this prejudice was widely prevalent. It is hardly credible, considering the depth and earnestness of Paul's character, that he could have attached importance to so superficial a view of the subject.

May not another interpretation of this language be admissible, differing from either of the three above referred to? When the apostle insists that the bishop must not be given to wine, we easily understand him to mean, that he must be an example of the virtue of temperance. When he says he must not be greedy of filthy lucre, we understand him to mean that he must be an example of wisdom and liberality in respect to the use of this world's goods. When therefore he insists on his being the husband of one wife, why may we not equally understand him to mean, that he must be an example of the domestic virtues, dwelling with one wife in all purity and fidelity, quite irrespective of the question whether he had been married more than once or not? He must be the true and faithful husband of one woman. This interpretation is equally applicable to the "wife of one husband," and in perfect harmony with the spirit and aim of the whole passage, and with what the apostle hath said elsewhere of marriage. To me it seems a just interpretation of the language.

To a mind soundly imbued with the spirit and teachings of the Scriptures, the ascetic celibacy which had certainly gained wide prevalence in the first half of the third century, and was then no recent novelty, must appear in strange and painful contrast to those sound and sober views of marriage and the relations of the sexes generally, which everywhere meet us in the New Testament. It is a question of great interest by what causes this great sad revolution was produced, a revolution so disastrous to domestic virtue in that age and in so many ages that followed it. It is not necessary to go far to find those causes. Want of space forbids entering at large upon that field of inquiry. It is only necessary to say in this place that the asceticism of early Christianity was a direct outgrowth of the Gnostic

philosophy, which gained a wide prevalence over Europe and Western Asia and Northern Africa in the times of which I am writing. For a more complete discussion of the subject than I am able to give, yet far less complete than it deserves, the reader is referred to Isaac Taylor's "Ancient Christianity," already mentioned in this chapter.

That philosophy maintains that the union of an intelligent soul with a material body is not the work of the Supreme Ruler of the universe, but of an inferior and hostile divinity, the creator of this world. It maintains that the subjection of the soul to those appetites and passions which result from its connection with the body is a degradation, and the source of moral depravity. It hence infers the necessity of a rigid mortification of all our bodily appetites as the only means of recovering for the human soul its proper dignity, virtue and happiness. According to this system asceticism becomes the only possible instrument of reformation. At a very early date in the history of Christianity, the church encountered this philosophy, first in Egypt and Syria, but in greater or less degree over all christendom. The fundamental doctrine of this philosophy, the church resisted as a fatal heresy. But while resisting, she could not escape its fatal influence. That influence was like some pestilential contagion originating it may be in the filthy and miserable homes and squalid haunts of poverty and vice, but overflowing and pervading the palaces of the rich, the great and the learned, and involving all in a common calamity. In like manner the Gnostic philosophy invaded and poisoned the whole western world, and exerted its blighting influence almost equally upon those who resisted and those who accepted it. This philosophy, and not the Scriptures either of the Old Testament or the New, is the source of the ascetic

celibacy of the early church. It was not Christianity, but a fiery trial through which Christianity must pass.

So far is it from being a matter of wonder, that these errors arose in the church, that they were foreseen and distinctly predicted. "Forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats, which God had created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" are the characteristic features of that asceticism which invaded the early church. Paul plainly mentions them among the doctrines of those false teachers who were to arise in latter times.¹ In his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians he seemed sad and depressed in spirit in view of a "falling away" which was coming, and even declared that the "mystery of iniquity" doth already work.²

It is unnecessary to cite particular passages to prove what no one at all acquainted with the subject will deny, that, in addition to the grave departures from the teachings and example of the primitive church which have been already specified, before the middle of the third century, the churches had already lost in a great degree that local independence which certainly did exist in the primitive age, and had adopted in its stead provincial or national centralization under the government of bishops. There are also not wanting indications of decided tendencies towards the acceptance of the primacy of the bishop of Rome, although it was by no means generally acknowledged. The primacy of metropolitan bishops was already recognized.

The errors which have been pointed out, as having arisen in the second and third centuries, are seminal principles, from which a hierarchy must inevitably grow. When once it was assumed, that the officers of the

¹ 1 Tim. iv: 3.

² 2 Thess. ii: 3-10.

church were a clergy, empowered by the laying on of hands to perform the exclusive function of exhibiting baptism and the Lord's Supper to the people, they were invested with a degree of influence in all the affairs of the church, which must have been nearly irresistible. The men who were believed to hold the only key to these sacred rites, with power to open and shut the door at their own discretion, could not fail to have everything in the church in their own way. They would soon be looked upon with so much awe and reverence, that no layman would think of approaching to equality with them in respect to any matter pertaining to religion. When the clergy that was endowed with this function was constituted in three orders, rising one above the other in well-defined gradation, another exceedingly important element of hierarchal power was introduced. This again was greatly intensified by recognizing the bishop as possessing the exclusive power of ordination, so that only by the laying on of his hands could any one acquire the authority to minister in the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. By this means the bishop acquired a very extraordinary degree of influence, both over the lower orders of the clergy, and the whole Christian brotherhood.

The influence thus acquired by the bishop was again greatly augmented by the fact that the bishop could not be inducted into his high office by the election of the congregation, and by the laying on of the hands of the presbyters of that congregation, as certainly was the custom in the churches of the apostles, but must be ordained by two or three bishops of other congregations. A principle unknown to apostolic times was established, that the power of investing men by the laying on of hands with the gift of ministering in baptism and the Lord's Supper never came up from the brotherhood

through the presbyters, but always down from the "bench of bishops." Here was a hierarchy fully organized. A greater departure from the usages of the apostolic church is scarcely possible. The people would soon cease to inquire whence the bishops derived the power they conferred, and would assume that those powers came by direct succession from the apostles, and by the immediate gift of Christ himself. The way was therefore prepared for obtaining ready credence of the fiction of the perpetual corporation of bishops composed of the official successors of the apostles.

It is evident, that the germ of this whole hierarchal system is the power of the keys in the hands of the clergy, not as it was understood by Jesus himself when he promised that power to Peter, but in the sense in which it has been so long understood in the church as hierarchically constituted. Grant to a clergy the exclusive power of the keys as just explained, and that clergy will more and more absorb to itself the teaching function also. It will be readily admitted by the people, that they who have the sacred rites of the church in their exclusive keeping must know better than other men the nature of those rites, the value of the blessings to be derived from them, and the qualifications necessary to a participation in these blessings. The instructions of such a clergy, respecting these rites and their relation to salvation, will therefore be received by the people with implicit faith, as invested with authority little short of divine. The clergy themselves will be under a constant temptation to magnify the importance of observing these rites, and to cultivate in the minds of the people feelings of superstitious awe in respect to them. Under such circumstances, it was to be expected that these rites would be more and more corrupted from their original simplicity, and become to an increas-

ing extent the ready instruments of hierarchal power. Finding therefore as we have done, that seed already planted in that early age, and taking deep root, there is no occasion to wonder at its gigantic growth, or at the baleful shadow it has cast upon the Christian church and name through so many ages. What I affirm is, that that seed was not planted by Christ and the apostles, but by the enemy that sowed tares among the wheat in the corrupter ages that followed.

The gravest task imposed upon the ecclesiastical historian of the nineteenth century is to determine in what relation the church of the ante-Nicene age really stands to the church of the apostles. If it can be successfully maintained, that it is the legitimate development of the church of the apostles, then there is no escaping the conclusion, that Jesus Christ and his apostles are logically responsible for the church of the Middle Ages, as well as for the church of the ante-Nicene period; for it is vain to deny that the ante-Nicene church is logically responsible for that which came in the following ages. On the other hand if, as has been maintained in this chapter, the ante-Nicene church is to be regarded as standing in strong contrast to the apostolic church, presenting a variety of ideas, usages and constitutional principles derived not from Christ and the apostles, but from the corrupted Judaism and the hoary superstitions of paganism, from one or the other of which Christianity made all its converts, then Christ and his apostles are not responsible for any of the corruptions that followed in any succeeding age; and they may be looked to as the source of reforming power, by which the church of the present and the church of the future may be purified and made to conform to the grandly free and simple conception of the founder.

CHAPTER II.

HIERARCHY IN ITS MATURITY.

IN the preceding chapter we were lingering in the midst of the scenery of the infant church, while it was yet experiencing the persecuting violence of its pagan enemies, and engaged in a constant struggle to maintain its existence. In that survey of its condition, we were compelled, however reluctantly, to acknowledge that its constitution had been in some very important respects modified by surrounding influences, and that some ideas and usages had been introduced into it by the multitude of converts it had won from a corrupted Judaism, and from the ancient paganism of Greece and Rome and Phœnicia and Egypt, which were utterly foreign to the church of the apostles. The inquiry was also raised, What results were likely to come in after ages from the new elements which were thus introduced? In this chapter it is proposed to inquire whether the apprehensions which were there expressed were verified in the subsequent history of the church.

Let us then transfer our point of observation forward in the progress of the ages, over a period of eight hundred years, from the third to the eleventh century. The western Roman Empire has long since passed away. Rome is no longer the Imperial City. Instead of the emperor, a new power sits enthroned in the city of the

seven hills. The sceptre is wielded, not by an emperor, but by a priest. He is indeed a temporal sovereign, but it is only over a small tract of Italian territory, in the near vicinity of what was once the Imperial City.

In the capacity of a temporal sovereign, he is inadequate to any aggressive enterprise, and able to defend his little dominion only by skilfully contracted alliances with other and more powerful states. And yet that petty sovereign, by a subtle force hitherto unknown to history, wields, from the Danube to the farthest extremity of the British Isles, and from Mount Atlas and the cataracts of the Nile to the Baltic, a power which Rome could never equal in the times of her mightiest emperors. The sovereign that exercises that power is Hildebrand, Pope Gregory VII. He is no descendant of the Cæsars, nor yet of the barbarous chieftains by whom the Cæsars were vanquished. He is the son of a carpenter, educated by the kindness of an uncle, brought to the notice of men in power only by his talents and personal qualities, first the favorite of two successive popes, then the master-spirit that procured the election of the two next in succession, and governed christendom by his influence over them, and finally himself elevated to the pontifical throne, to rule Europe with a rod of iron. One grand scheme for aggrandizing the papal power filled and fired his soul. On the one hand, he sought to make himself and his successors entirely independent of all secular and civil powers in whatever land, in appointing all the dignitaries and officers of the church, and inducting them into their offices, thus giving to the papal government of the whole Christian church, as it was called, and supposed to be, the centralized compactness of a great empire. On the other hand he claimed to occupy a position superior to that of all secular rulers, and actually exer-

cised the power of dethroning kings and emperors, and releasing their subjects from all the obligations of their allegiance ; and he succeeded in obtaining such a recognition of these claims, as enabled him to inspire terror in the hearts of the most powerful monarchs in christendom.

The high pretensions of Pope Gregory VII., and the awe and terror which by means of them he was able to inspire in his contemporaries, are so notorious, that it is unnecessary to quote any authorities in support of the assertions just made. I am concerned at present with the inquiry, what the source was of that mysterious power by which this man held Europe in awe, and struck terror to the hearts of the proudest monarchs on earth. To answer this inquiry is to give the key, not only of many centuries of European history, but of the government of the church from Constantine to the present time. It was simply and only what has been known in church history as the "power of the keys."

The history of those times renders the truth of this assertion exceedingly apparent. Pope Gregory VII. was a very zealous reformer of certain abuses in the church, especially of all violations of the strict chastity of the clergy, whether by marriage or concubinage, and of all simoniacal practices. Henry IV., Emperor of Germany, and some of his predecessors had exercised the right of presenting incumbents to vacant sees, to the prejudice of the immemorial right of the clergy and people to elect, and had themselves assumed the prerogative of investing such incumbents with the badges of their ecclesiastical authority, which had hitherto exclusively belonged to the metropolitan, on whom the right of ordaining devolved. Henry had not only exercised the right of presenting to vacant benefices, but had laid himself open to the charge of simony by having notoriously sold them to the highest bidder. In his efforts to

put an end to these usurpations and abuses, the pope was brought into fierce conflict with the emperor.

Gregory published his edict against simony. The emperor complimented the zeal of the pope for the reform of the church. The pope demanded the privilege of holding councils throughout Germany, to give effect to his decrees. Henry was quite conscious of being himself the chief offender in this matter, and therefore refused permission. The pope held a council at Rome, deposed several high dignitaries of the church, and excommunicated five of the imperial court, whose services the emperor had employed in his simoniacal transactions. Henry admitted the existence of simony, and sought to pacify the pope by declaring his intention to discountenance it in the future.

Hildebrand was not to be baffled thus. The energy of his nature was fully roused, and he made haste to push matters to extremities. He sent legates into Germany, bearing positive orders to the emperor to present himself forthwith at Rome, to clear himself before the pope and his council of various charges alleged against him by his subjects. This high-handed demand was without any precedent. Accordingly Henry treated it as a wanton insult, and retorted it by assembling at Worms a council of some twenty German bishops (some of whom were already embroiled with Gregory), who pronounced Hildebrand unworthy of his dignity, and deposed him. Gregory in a full assembly of one hundred and ten bishops excommunicated Henry, declared that he had forfeited the kingdoms of Germany and Italy, and absolved his subjects from their allegiance.

The control of the pope over the allegiance of subjects to their civil rulers was hitherto supported by no precedent ; but the event showed that it was far enough

from being mere *brutum fulmen*. Much discontent already existed among the emperor's German subjects. Insurrections broke out in various quarters against him, as soon as the edict of excommunication was promulgated among his subjects ; and there were some among his best friends whose fidelity was to some extent paralyzed by the papal anathema under which he had fallen. He was soon forced to consent to an arrangement for the settlement of the difficulty most disadvantageous to himself, by which the claims and wrongs of both were to be submitted to the pope. A council was to be held at Augsburg, at which the pope was to preside. In the mean time Henry was to remain suspended from his royal dignity.

The emperor soon became so much alarmed at the prospect of being obliged publicly to submit to the pope in the midst of his own subjects, that he determined to escape from that necessity by privately submitting to his authority, and thus obtaining the removal of the anathema which he found to be crushing him down with destructive weight. For this purpose he crossed the Alps with a few attendants during the severity of an inclement winter, and proceeded to the fortress of Canossa in Italy, where the pope then had his residence. In penitential garments, he presented himself at the gate of the fortress as a sinner and a suppliant, humbly requesting to be admitted to the presence of the pope, and to receive absolution. For three days the proudest monarch in Europe, with bare head and feet, and unprotected from the season, waited fasting before the walls, in solitary and hopeless humiliation. He was then permitted to approach the pope, and receive the absolution for which he had submitted to all this hardship and utter degradation, both from his personal and regal dignity. Nor was he even yet restored to the titles

and dignities of royalty, from which this Roman priest had deposed him.¹

It is not necessary to our purpose to follow the history further. What was the secret of the power which this man Hildebrand possessed over the proudest monarch in Europe? It is nothing to the purpose to say, that Henry was weakened by discontents already existing among his subjects, and for that reason less able to cope with his adversary. That is, of course, obvious. But why was the pope an element of any importance to the situation? Why could his edict weaken Henry with his friends, and make his enemies strong against him? Why did a powerful monarch think himself under a necessity of making his peace with this Roman priest, at the expense of all this humiliation, peril and hardship? One answer only can be given. The pope was believed to possess the "keys of the kingdom of heaven." He, in the opinion of all Europe, could open and no man could shut, and shut and no man could open. In the plenitude of his priestly power, he had cut off the emperor from all participation in the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, by which alone, in the unanimous opinion of the age, the blessing and favor of God can come to any man, and the curse of God was believed to be resting on him, which the pope alone could remove. His subjects regarded him as a being accursed of God, and were stricken with superstitious awe and dread at the thought of recognizing as their sovereign a man who was thus accursed.

That power by which this man Hildebrand made monarchs tremble on their thrones had been growing for ages ; but it had grown from a single root, and from

¹ Waddington's Church Hist., Chap. XVI, Sect. II.

that root it still drew all its vigor. It was first assumed, that there must be in the Christian church a clergy empowered by the laying on of hands to dispense to the people these rites which Jesus Christ instituted; next that this clergy necessarily existed in a hierarchy of three orders,—bishops, presbyters, and deacons; next, that this clergy was a priesthood, and the Lord's Supper an offering, a sacrifice which could only be performed by the intervention of their priestly function; next, that bishops only could, by the laying on of their hands, confer this priestly power; next, that metropolitan bishops were invested with a primacy over all the other bishops of a province or a nation; and finally, that the bishop of Rome was invested with a primacy of all other bishops, and over the whole church of God under heaven.

What I distinctly affirm is, that not one of these assumptions receives the slightest support from the apostolic records contained in the New Testament. The whole conception of the power of the keys, as Hildebrand wielded it to the terror of Europe, is as shameless a perversion as human ingenuity ever invented, of the words of Jesus addressed to Peter, which have been carefully examined in a former chapter. I also affirm with equal confidence, that all the assumptions enumerated in the previous paragraph except the last were not only adopted by the church of the second and third centuries, but were deeply rooted in it. The proof of this was given in the previous chapter. The church of Hildebrand is but a natural and normal development of the ante-Nicene church as exhibited by Bunsen in his "Hippolytus and his Age."

When first the functions of bishops began to be accurately defined and their powers to be magnified, the idea of a succession to the apostolic office was not

claimed nor thought of. So far as my examination has extended, the idea does not occur in the remaining documents of the ante-Nicene age. But the mind of the age was deeply imbued with the idea of the hierarchal organization of powers. It was soon held, that bishops only could ordain bishops, that the power of the presbyter to officiate at the eucharistic sacrifice came down to him from the bishops. The next assumption was very natural, that the bishops must have derived their powers from the apostles. It was not proved from Scripture or history. It was assumed. The instructions of Paul to Timothy and Titus had doubtless at this point exerted very great influence. But they entirely fail to meet the case ; for there is not the slightest intimation that Timothy and Titus ever claimed, or that Paul ever claimed for them, any power to qualify a clergy by the laying on of their hands to exhibit the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Such a power the bishops of the second and third centuries certainly did claim and exercise. Whence could they have derived it but from the apostles ? To a people already accustomed to the undisputed exercise of this power, its apostolic origin must have seemed a matter of course, while to us it seems incredible and impossible. In the same manner it would be assumed without inquiry, that Jesus himself had conferred this exclusive power on the apostles. It is assumption from first to last ; assumption then and assumption now.

It was first assumed, not only without proof but against proof, that an official administration was necessary to the proper observance of the Lord's Supper ; then that the power to perform this official function is conferred by the laying on of hands ; then that this power is conferred by the laying on of the bishop's hands ; and finally, that all these powers must have been

derived from the apostles, and were conferred on them by the Founder of Christianity. It is a long chain spanning eighteen centuries of Christian history ; but when we call for the last link in the chain, and the point of support from which the whole is suspended, proof not only fails us, but the whole system of ideas is solemnly contradicted by the whole spirit and aim of primitive Christianity. Yet it was by means of these very assumptions that Hildebrand brandished his false "keys of the kingdom of heaven" over Europe, and brought her mightiest monarch to his feet clad in sack-cloth.

It is true that the climax of this series of arrogant assumptions was never attained, till the words of the Lord Jesus promising to give to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven were seized upon and interpreted, as a grant of power to govern the whole church of God with perpetual succession in that high office through all coming ages. But a priesthood already in possession of such a treasury of the grace of God as baptism and the Lord's Supper, would have no difficulty in usurping absolute control of the teaching function, and putting any interpretation on the words of Jesus which might be helpful of their ambitious aims. To the consummation of this giant fraud, it was necessary indeed that it should be believed that the apostle Peter was actually the first bishop of Rome. History was manipulated accordingly, and though there is no convincing evidence that he ever saw the Imperial City, still less that he ever held office in the Church of Rome, yet it early became a part of the faith of every good Catholic, that the fisherman of Galilee was the first Roman primate, and transmitted to every subsequent occupant of the pontifical chair those keys of the kingdom of heaven, by the false terrors of which popes have overawed christendom for

twelve centuries. There is not in human history another chapter of superstition, fraud and delusion so deeply humiliating, so discreditable to human nature as this. And yet but grant that Jesus the Messiah of God instituted the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and committed them to an exclusive self-perpetuating priesthood, to be by them dispensed to all the faithful, and every subsequent step in this descending series of fraud and delusion becomes so easy and natural, that we must almost regard it as a logical necessity.

Yet the history of the times was in some respects exceedingly favorable to its complete development. When Constantine came to the imperial throne, and made Christianity the religion of the empire, the government of the church became still more centralized in the emperor and the Roman primate. When the same emperor transferred his court from Rome to Constantinople, the prestige of more than a thousand years of history still clung to Rome, and made her bishop the metropolitan of the church universal. The downfall of the Western Empire, a little more than a century after the death of Constantine, left the bishops of Rome free from the restraints of imperial authority, to assert a still more unlimited supremacy over all the West, and to give to the government of the church in their hands the compactness of a vast priestly empire, constructed after the model of the fallen imperial power. But the source of the power which they now wielded from the Danube to the British Isles was still unchangeably the same. It was the power of a priesthood which had in its keeping the sacred mysteries of Christianity. It was a growth from that one root which, we have seen, had been planted in the church of the ante-Nicene ages, and had attained a vigorous growth so near the cradle of Christianity itself.

I find the claim asserted in certain quarters, that startling and even terrific as the power exercised by Pope Gregory VII. seems to us, and much as we should deprecate its re-establishment over modern christendom, it was yet, in the circumstances of the times, a beneficent power necessary for the protection of the church against the encroaching tyranny of princes, and that in this instance it was wisely and righteously used. Such a view of the subject is quite fallacious and delusive. It is certainly not necessary to deny that Henry IV., Emperor of Germany, was an unprincipled tyrant, and that his selling the benefices of the church to the highest bidder was a crime. We may even exult in the fact, that the pope used his power however exorbitant and dangerous to the social order of the world, in humiliating and restraining a monarch so unscrupulous. We may sympathize with the pope, proud and haughty as he was, rather than with the emperor degraded and in sackcloth for his crimes. But all this has nothing at all to do with a just historic estimate of this transaction. That the emperor was a tyrant may be very true. But it is no less true that the church in those times had so divided the sovereignty in Germany and in every other country of Europe, and so encroached upon the prerogatives of all secular sovereigns, as greatly to embarrass all the operations of civil government, and to render the priesthood for the most part independent of the secular power. The church was stronger than the king, and in consequence of the conflict between the two all the evils of anarchy were often produced. In the progress of this conflict, civil rulers were under the constant necessity of resisting ecclesiastical power, to protect themselves and their subjects and all Europe against the ever-active encroachments of Rome.

Both parties in this conflict were ambitious and

unscrupulous. In particular emergencies, sometimes one was right, sometimes the other ; and it is of little consequence to the matter we have before us whether the right of the question was with the emperor or the pope. The only thing important to be noticed is, that a Roman priest had acquired an ascendancy over all Europe, which constantly threatened the independence of sovereigns on their thrones, and brought the very existence of civil government into peril ; and that the source of that ascendancy was the power of the keys, the fatal misinterpretation of the promise which Jesus made to Peter. It may be possible to adduce many instances in which this power was used to accomplish a righteous purpose. Any despotic power may sometimes be used righteously, despots are not always tyrants. But despotism is always as liable and more likely to be used tyrannically than righteously, and is always destructive of human liberty and happiness ; and no despotism is so much to be dreaded as that which is to be exercised in the name of God and religion.

We have a perfect illustration in what is of frequent occurrence among ourselves. A riot sometimes takes place among laborers of foreign birth, all of whom are loyal to the papal church. The excitement is too great to be quelled by the efforts of the local police, and very serious consequences are threatened. The priest is summoned to the scene, — the priest, whose only instrument of government is the power of the keys, and by its magic spell commands the peace and restores order. "What a blessed thing," exclaims many a good, easy-going Protestant, "is the influence of the priest ! How much worse it might have been but for him !" He does not perceive that the same ghostly power which was employed in quelling that riot enables the papal priesthood to control the whole papal vote at any elec-

tion, and cast it for that party which is believed to be most unscrupulously subservient to the ambitious designs of the hierarchy, and that the same power brings the liberty and prosperity of a great nation into constant peril. It would have been much better that the civil power should have maintained its own unquestioned supremacy, by exerting any necessary amount of force, than that the ghostly power of the priest should have been invoked at all. It is necessary to the safety of society, that disorderly persons should know, that the civil power is able and determined to keep the peace without invoking to its aid the ghostly terrors which superstition inspires. Universally it is much better, that the church should suffer any oppression which the secular powers of the earth can inflict upon her than to protect herself against it by any such usurpation over the consciences of men, as that by which Hildebrand terrified Henry IV. and reduced him to a degrading submission.

In this aspect of the case, the same principle may perhaps be still better illustrated by the history of the conflict between Henry II. of England, and Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the twelfth century.¹ Henry was the most powerful monarch of his time, both on account of the extent of his dominions in Britain and on the Continent, and on account of his eminent talents and consummate policy. Thomas à Becket was an Englishman, born in a private station, and raised to power in the church and kingdom only by his great talents, industry and energy. He first attracted the attention of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, and was employed by him in very important services.

¹ Hume's Hist. England, Boston edition, Vol. I. pp. 296-326 inclusive, 343.

On the accession of Henry to the throne, he made this man his chancellor, and in that high office he rose to great dignity and splendor ; and on the death of Theobald, Henry promoted him to be Archbishop of Canterbury.

From an early period in Henry's reign, he had been earnestly seeking to confine the privileges of the clergy, who had advanced their pretensions beyond all reasonable bounds, within their ancient limits ; and effectually to defend the civil against the ambitious encroachments of the ecclesiastical power. While Becket filled the office of chancellor, he had been perfectly aware of the designs of the king, and had co-operated with him in promoting them. As soon however as he was seated in the arch-episcopal chair, he entirely disregarded the plans and wishes of his royal benefactor, and became the unscrupulous champion of the clergy, in preserving and extending those extravagant pretensions which Henry was seeking to restrain within limits not inconsistent with the dignity and independence of the crown. This brought the king and the archbishop, and through them the civil and ecclesiastical powers, into a fierce and disastrous collision, which embittered a large portion of Henry's reign, and brought his kingdom to the very verge of revolution and anarchy. Many years of his life were passed in constant fear, lest he himself should incur excommunication from the pope, who of course sided with the archbishop, and lest his whole kingdom should be laid under a papal interdict, depriving all his subjects of all the rites and privileges of religion, till they should abandon their allegiance to a sovereign on whom the terrible anathema of the pope was resting. Such an interdict was at that time regarded as more to be dreaded than the suspension of the rain and the sunshine of heaven. Against such terrors as these the

most powerful monarch of the time was only able to defend himself and his subjects by the most abject and humiliating submission to the pope and his clergy, and by doing such penance at the tomb of the archbishop—who, in the progress of the conflict, had been assassinated—as in this age can scarcely be believed to have been actually endured by a powerful king of England.

We can be at no loss as to the source of that terrible power which the pope and the clergy were able to exercise over the life and policy of such a monarch. The mysterious power which the pope wielded over all Europe in the name of the church and of Jesus Christ, more terrible than the imaginary thunderbolts of Jupiter were to his ancient worshippers, had its origin only in the control of the clerical corporation over the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, so that that corporation could admit to the enjoyment of these rites, and exclude from them, at its own discretion. What we witness in the twelfth century with so much of horror and disgust is only the full maturity of a plant which had already taken root and attained to a vigorous growth in the church of the second and third centuries. If that seed was planted by Jesus himself, or by the apostles acting in his name and by his authority, then is Christianity responsible for the full-grown hierarchy of the Middle Ages with all its terrific powers.

Undoubtedly the ignorance and superstition of the people in the early ages of Christianity facilitated the development of this monstrous system. But it must be borne in mind, that it was this same ignorance and superstition of the people which rendered the incipient corruptions of the ante-Nicene age not only possible but inevitable. Into no previous age of the world could Christianity have been introduced with less liability to these same corrupting causes. So far as we can com-

prehend the force of moral causes, the coming in of these corruptions was an incident inseparable from the first beginnings of Christianity in the world, and when once introduced in whatever manner they must and would bear fruit after their kind. Doubtless also the decay of the civil powers of the earth after the fall of the Western Empire greatly facilitated the aggrandizement of the priestly corporation that ruled the church. But these are not the causes, they are only the favoring circumstances that assisted the development of the cause. Let it be admitted even now that such a priestly hierarchy exists by unquestionable divine right, and that that clerical hierarchy has the exclusive right to dispense baptism and the Lord's Supper to all the rest of mankind, and that hierarchy would be rapidly and inevitably matured into an ecclesiastical system no less arrogant and no less adverse to the liberties of mankind than the church of the Middle Ages. The bishops, fully assured of their unquestioned power of the keys, and that by universal consent they only have the gift of qualifying a clergy to administer valid sacraments, will rapidly work over that clergy to their own opinions ; they will magnify more and more the importance of valid sacraments to human well-being, and the dignity and influence of the clergy which has the exclusive power of dispensing them to the people ; they will have little difficulty in emancipating themselves from the lay influences which, owing to the omnipresence of dissent on every side, are now an element of considerable weight even in prelatical churches, and the time would not be distant when a priestly power no less terrific than that of mediæval Europe would again overshadow christendom. If men can be made to believe, that God has intrusted such a treasury of his grace as the Lord's Supper, regarded as a divinely appointed

rite which all Christian people are bound to observe, to a priestly corporation having perpetual succession, then will it also be believed that that same corporation is intrusted with the religious teaching of mankind. The key that locks up and unlocks that rite will become the key of knowledge and opinion also ; and a permanent body of men intrusted with such control over the religious destinies of their fellow-men will become the arbiters of their temporal interests also. The greater will still include the less. He that possesses the keys of the kingdom of heaven will also possess the keys of earthly dominion. The more we reflect on the subject, the more profound will be our conviction, that the gravest question which yet remains to be decided by the authority of the New Testament is, the question whether Jesus intended to commit the rite of the Lord's Supper to a self-perpetuating corporation, to be by them dispensed to all the faithful. Grant that power by undisputed right to any priestly hierarchy, and that hierarchy will rule the world with a rod of iron.

All the other elements of the gigantic hierarchy of the Middle Ages were developed by a process equally natural, from beginnings which have been shown to have existed in the church of the second and third centuries. We have already seen that even the church of those early centuries had adopted a ritualistic worship which was quite unknown to the churches of the New Testament. By this it is meant that importance had begun to be attached to the forms of speech, action and dress in which worship was performed, and that worship had begun to be conducted by a prescribed rubric of which we find no trace in the apostolic records. This could not but be one of the methods in which an exclusive hierarchy would magnify its office, shroud its functions in a cloud of mystery, and multiply

the occasions on which its interventions would become indispensable. A priestly worship will always be ritual, precisely in proportion as it is priestly. The growth of the priestly will always be indicated by a corresponding growth of the ritual. If we examine the cumbrous body of superstition which has overlaid the institution of the Supper in the papal church, so as scarcely to leave a trace of the original rite, we find the beginning of this process of change in the ante-Nicene church, and certain to be developed, with the progress of priestly usurpation, into the full-grown Mass of the Middle Ages and of the present time.

The same is eminently true of the rite of baptism. In the form of baptism which was scrupulously practised in the ante-Nicene church, how little there is in common with John's baptizing in the river Jordan, or Philip's baptism of the eunuch!¹ And how evident it is, that in the change from the latter to the former, the first step, and that a very important step, had been taken towards substituting the baptism of the church of the Middle Ages for that of the church of the apostles. Verily, "the mystery of iniquity did already work." To me I confess it is matter of wonder and astonishment, that any one can consider the progress of these changes and not be shocked at this whole array of holy oil, and holy water, and holy vestments, and holy attitudes, and holy prescribed forms of speech, from the ante-Nicene church to the present time. The growth of ritualism in certain modern churches is only a repetition of the very process, by which the church of the second and third centuries was changed into the church of Hildebrand and Thomas à Becket. The only way in which it is possible to arrest that morbid growth is not by acts of general

¹ Hip. and his Age, Vol. II. pp. 17, 24. Acts viii: 26-40.

convention, or decisions of the court of arches, but by exterminating the seeds of evil from which it springs.

It has also been shown, that the church, very early after the apostolic times, began to intermeddle with marriage and the relations of the sexes otherwise than in the interest of pure morals. This element also in the ante-Nicene church, like all its other departures from the simplicity of the apostles, was sure to bear its own proper fruit. Once admit that, though a second marriage is not immoral in a layman, it is inconsistent with a certain priestly sanctity which should belong to the clergy, and such a clergy as was already recognized in the early church will be sure to improve upon the idea, as a means of more effectually separating themselves from the mass of the faithful, and of impressing the people with a higher conception of clerical sanctity. It will not be long, till it will begin to be believed that a life of celibacy is the proper condition of a clergyman ; and that there is religious merit in such a life, and both men and women will begin to emulate it as a means of commending themselves to the favor of God.

Such a clergy would also most naturally seek to extend its power over the people by usurping control over the marriage relations of the laity. Marriage, like the Lord's Supper, would become a sacrament, which could only be dispensed to the people by the exercise of priestly functions ; and in like manner the priesthood would easily usurp the regulation of all the relations of the sexes, and of the most sacred intimacies of married life. Let a clergy of exclusive powers and functions begin to meddle with marriage otherwise than in the interest of a pure morality, and it will find no stopping-place short of the enforced celibacy of the clergy, the sanctity of religious vows of perpetual chastity in both

sexes, and those abominations of the confessional¹ from which no man can remove the veil by describing them in plain English, without forfeiting his reputation as a pure-minded man. In this respect also the church of the second and third centuries is the parent of the mediæval church, and of the papal church of our times. Any clergy once placed in the relations in which the clergy of that early age stood to the people, so soon as it should become a hierarchy in three orders, holding the only key to the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, would confine its usurpations over the rights and liberties of mankind only by the limits of possibility; and once admit, that a certain impurity is incurred by marriage itself, which unfits one for holy functions, and for the nearest approach to God which is possible for a mortal, and all the usurpations of the papal church become an easy possibility.

In the progress of this revolution, the evil consequences of this war on nature were a thousand times demonstrated by experience. Complaints of the violation of chastity on the part of the clergy, notwithstanding the most stringent regulations of popes, prelates and councils enforcing it, are found in every age,² but the one only remedy for the evil was either not thought of, or was constantly rejected by the hierarchy. The celibacy of the clergy is a powerful and indispensable means of uniting them in a sacred fraternity, separated in interest and feeling from the rest of mankind, and of rendering them a compact and ready instrument for executing the will of the hierarchy in every part of the earth. It must therefore be adhered to at whatever sacrifice of freedom and virtue.

¹ See Dens' Theology. A more particular reference is neither necessary nor desirable.

² Waddington's Church Hist, Chap. XVI. Sect. 2.

For the same reason such a hierarchy will retain its hold as long as possible on all the moralities of private life, and on all the intercourse of the sexes in its most delicate relations to the happiness of domestic life, and the reproduction of the species. This is the maturity of the hierarchy. This is the papal church of the Middle Ages and of the present time; and its seeds were planted and took root in the church of the two centuries which immediately followed the age of the apostles.

It will be readily admitted, that some of the corruptions of the mediæval church cannot be traced back to the church of the second and third centuries, though all those thus far spoken of certainly can be. One very important instrument of power in the papal church is the opinion most religiously held by all her members, that the intervention of the priest in the hour of death is necessary to the safety of the soul, and that priestly functions still exercise a controlling influence on its happiness after it has left the body. I know not that any traces of the doctrines of extreme unction and purgatory can be found in the ante-Nicene age. They seem to have originated at a later period. There was indeed one custom of that early age, which seems to have been in some degree analogous to extreme unction. Baptism was often deferred till just before death, under the idea that in that ceremony, all the sins one had previously committed are purged away, while it has no efficacy in respect to sins committed afterwards. If then one received baptism "*in articulo mortis*," he would go into the invisible world in a state of entire purity, whatever his previous sins might have been. That this is ante-Nicene cannot, I think, be denied. That it is apostolic, no sane man will pretend. This doctrine would make priestly functions indispensable in a dying hour.

Never have the pretensions of the papacy been pushed to an extent so daring and impious, as in our own age and under our own eye. It has been reserved for our own times to witness the astonishing spectacle of an august assembly, professing to represent the whole church of God under heaven, declaring that the man that sits in the papal chair at Rome, and wears the triple crown, is rendered by the grace of God infallible in all his official acts. For this age also, it has been reserved to witness the humiliating spectacle of the foremost man in genius and learning of all the English-speaking adherents of the religion of Rome, employing his powerful intellect in formulating this dogma of papal infallibility into a fundamental law of civil and ecclesiastical polity, which is expected to regulate all the governments of the world in all coming ages. Cardinal Archbishop Manning regards the church and the state as independent sovereignties, each having a perfectly distinct jurisdiction. Of the former the pope is made the head by his having succeeded to Peter's keys, and is qualified to be the vicerent of God on earth by the divine gift of infallibility. Of the latter, the civil magistrate is the head, with all the liabilities to error to which man is subject. As to the line which divides the respective jurisdictions of these two sovereignties, he holds that certain questions are purely secular. These belong entirely to the state. Other questions are purely religious. These belong entirely to the church, as governed by an infallible pope. Other questions still are partly secular and partly religious, and therefore belong partly to the church and partly to the state ; and as the pope alone is endowed with infallibility, it is his exclusive prerogative to draw the line which limits the jurisdiction of each of these sovereignties. According to this system,

two distinct sovereignties administered by independent human officials of right ought to exist in every nation of the earth,—the sovereignty of the state, and the sovereignty of the church ; and the infallible pope has the God-given prerogative of defining the limits of his own jurisdiction, and may claim and exercise just so much control over all the interests of society as he judges to be right. The bluntest intellect can perceive, that this is placing the pope above all the governments of the earth,—king of kings and lord of lords. It is the system of Hildebrand openly avowed and advocated in the nineteenth century and in the vernacular of the freest nations of the earth.

Nor is all this mere empty boast. All christendom has enjoyed the wit of the saying of the great German statesman, "We do not purpose to go to Canossa again." And yet Pope Pius IX. in the weakness of his old age, despoiled of all his temporal dominions, and as he claimed a prisoner in the Vatican, was, it may be suspected, powerful enough to make the emperor of Germany in the midst of his splendid successes sometimes feel the truth of the words of the poet, —

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

It often required all the skill, energy and wisdom of the foremost statesman of Europe to save Germany from being thrown into convulsion and anarchy, by the political power of that same Roman priest. The influence which Pius IX. was able to exert, not only in Germany but throughout christendom, after he was completely divested of secular sovereignty, is the opprobrium of our civilization. Nor was his influence limited to the old monarchies of Europe. On this side of the Atlantic also, and in every part of our free republic, the political influence of the pope awakens grave appre-

hension in the mind of every thoughtful patriot. As often as our Presidential election occurs, the Roman pontiff is able to command hundreds of thousands of votes, and to cast them in solid mass for the candidate and the party most likely to be the pliant instruments of his ambitious purposes. The question from what source this wondrous power is derived is interesting, not only to the Christian scholar, but to every patriot and every statesman. Nor need we go far to seek it. The secular power of the pope was never of much importance in the political system of christendom. He was never able to inspire any terror by Cæsar's sword. It was not that which brought Henry IV. of Germany to Canossa. The loss of it is likely to exert no perceptible influence on his political power. He is still believed by many millions to possess the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and by these to be invested with a power over human well-being no less terrific than the power of shutting up the heavens, so that it shall not rain on the earth. By these ghostly powers, these invisible terrors which have their seat only in opinion, disordered by superstition, the pope makes the thrones of kings and emperors to tremble beneath them, and governs republics at his will, however loudly they boast of their freedom. This power had its origin when the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper were taken away from the free use of all the Lord's people, and locked up in the keeping of a self-perpetuating priestly hierarchy. This was done before the time of Constantine, while the church was yet struggling for existence with the persecuting power of pagan Rome.

Historical authorities of the highest respectability may be adduced for the opinion that the changes in the constitution of the church which were made in the second and third centuries, so far from being disastrous

to infant Christianity, were necessary and eminently beneficial; that the simple, spiritual fraternity of the apostolic age was no more fitted to endure in the dark and troublous times upon which the church was so soon to be thrown, than the bark canoe of the savage is to encounter the storms of mid-ocean; that it was indispensable that the church should, as a condition of surviving the rude shock of the downfall of the empire and the decay of civilization, assume an organization no less hierarchal, and modes of worship no less ritual than those which sprung up in the ante-Nicene ages, and develop them into the iron-bound system of the Middle Ages.

At first view this seems plausible, and it is by many accepted as profoundly wise. But is it really sound? The first thought which it suggests is, that it is by no means very creditable to the statesmanlike foresight of our Lord, though we should make no account of the prophetic prescience with which he was endowed. I am averse to saving the reputation of the ante-Nicene church, at the expense of the good sense of the founder of the church itself. That a being of such marvellous insight and foresight as Jesus possessed should found a society designed to endure through the ages, and yet construct it in such a manner, that it would be necessary in the very next century fundamentally to change its constitution, in order to save it from extinction, is quite incredible. If this could be proved to be true, it would damage his reputation for wisdom and foresight through all after times. If this is so, Jesus made a fatal mistake in constituting the church; and the church which has come down to us is not his church after all, but another, which wiser men than he instituted in place of the ephemeral thing which he planned. To the superior wisdom of the fathers of the second and third

centuries we are indebted for ever having heard the name of Jesus, or known anything of his gospel. Certainly this view of the subject does little honor to Jesus or the apostles.

Another suggestion no less important is, that if the church as Jesus constituted it was not suited to dark and stormy times, then it could not have been suited to the times in which it was founded ; for that too was pre-eminently such an age. If a strong hierarchal government was ever necessary to the order and safety of the church, it would seem that it must have been so in that age. The church was very largely composed of converts from the lower classes in the cities of the empire, rude, ignorant and greatly incapacitated by education and habit to appreciate the spiritual doctrines and pure morality of Christianity, and everywhere surrounded by adverse opinion and example, and constantly exposed to a merciless storm of persecution. The first century of the Christian era was also a time of great civil commotion and violent revolutions, — the time of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero and Domitian. The condition of society in the second century was much more orderly and tranquil ; it was the age of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian and the Antonines. No historical reason can be assigned why the constitution established by the apostles was less suited to the condition of society in the second and third centuries, than in the first ; and if they failed in adapting it to the necessities of after ages, they must have equally failed in adapting it to their own. If this view of the case must be accepted as sound, then was Jesus' conception of the kingdom of heaven only the sickly dream of an enthusiast, as unpractical as the wildest schemes of a modern socialist, a conception which would have utterly passed away in a century or two, if wiser men than he had not

reconstructed its constitution. This certainly is not my estimate of the founder of the Christian church, as compared with the fathers of the second and third centuries.

After all, what is the evidence which justifies the assertion of these would-be dictators in the department of philosophical history, — that the spiritual fraternity founded by Jesus and the apostles was unfit to encounter the dark and barbarous ages that followed? Who can show that if the men that composed the church in the post-apostolic age, and especially the men that governed it, had fully appreciated the spiritual nature of the Christian brotherhood established by Jesus, and adhered to it with unwavering fidelity, it might not have stood up as grandly in that age as it did in the age of Nero, Titus and Domitian, while the civil powers of the earth were shaken to their foundations, and Jerusalem itself was overthrown as by a terrible earthquake from the Lord? Such an assertion is not only unsustained by any sufficient evidence, but the considerations which weigh against it are abundant and convincing. That an organization which, in the bad times of the last ten of the twelve Cæsars, extended its peaceful conquests from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, could not have maintained even its existence in the times of Trajan and the Antonines, and the centuries that followed, is an assertion easy to make, but hard to prove.

It is obvious indeed, that if Christianity had not been shorn of much of its spiritual power by the superstitions and the spiritual despotisms which were early incorporated with it, the decay of civilization in the ancient world might have been greatly retarded, if not effectually arrested, and that the disasters which befell society at and after the fall of the empire might have

been greatly mitigated, and the total social eclipse of the Middle Age prevented. It is impossible for me to read the writings of such men as Tertullian and Cyprian without the suspicion, that a hierarchy governed by high officials of their fiery and imperious spirit must have been well fitted to provoke the bitter hostility of their pagan neighbors, and a great deal more exposed to persecution than such a church as that of the apostles would have been in like circumstances. I join with all Christian ages in admiring the sublime heroism of the men of that early age, in braving all the persecuting power of pagan Rome ; but I do not admire the haughty and imperious spirit which often appears in their writings, and which they seem to have sometimes manifested in the discharge of their official functions. It is not an agreeable thing to say, but the truth of the case compels me to say it. I do not wonder that a hierarchy so governed, ramified over the whole empire, excited the jealousy of the emperors, and exposed the Christians to the utmost violence of the persecutor. In a subsequent part of this work it will be shown, that an analogous constitution of the church in our own times does expose it to the distrust and suspicion of the political powers of society. The position occupied by the heads of the hierarchy in those ages could hardly have been more contradictory to the relations which our Lord said his followers should maintain to each other than it was. "They that would be great among them" did "exercise dominion over them," and "they that were chief among them" did "exercise authority upon them." It is hardly credible that a religious society pervading the whole empire and so governed could have failed to excite the hostility of a secular power so jealous as that of Rome, and especially when we remember that that secular power was accustomed to absorb into itself all

the religious powers of society. The literature of christendom is full of the assumption, that the simple church of the apostles could not have sustained itself in the dark ages that followed. The assertion is both gratuitous and contradictory to evidence.

CHAPTER III.

THE REFORMATION.

IT would not surprise me to learn, that at this stage of our inquiries, I seem to some of my readers to have proved much more than I intended, — to have involved myself inextricably in the conclusion, that the introduction of Christianity into the world was necessarily a hopeless failure. I have admitted and maintained, that it was impossible, under the well-known and established laws of moral causation, that the age to which it was introduced should appreciate it or fail to corrupt it; and that the same would have been true if any other age had been selected, instead of the one to which it was actually introduced. Indeed, if it suited our purpose to enter on the inquiry, it would be easy to show, that that age was in many important respects providentially qualified and fitted for the reception and improvement of the gift. If therefore that age failed to appreciate it, any other age would still more have failed.

It has also been shown that the corruptions which were introduced immediately after the apostles were removed from the scene, were the seeds of all the evils that followed, that by a logical necessity they were sure to be developed into all the superstitions and spiritual despotisms of the mediæval church, that the church of Hildebrand was logically and necessarily the offspring of the church of the second and third centuries. Why

then was not Christianity hopelessly corrupted? Why was it not buried in the grave of mediæval superstition and spiritual despotism, beyond the possibility of any future resurrection? How was any reformation possible?

If the considerations which have been insisted on in the last two chapters comprised the whole truth of the case, this difficulty would be insuperable. In respect to any other religion that has ever existed, the objection would be unanswerable. Buddhism, for example, has seen a brighter age than the present. At least this is so if we may trust the results of recent scholarship in respect to its history. In its early history it was purer than it is now. It has been deeply corrupted. But it has in itself no reforming power. Its corruptions are evidently destined to wax deeper and darker, till it is either supplanted by a better system, or perishes with the decaying civilization with which it is identified. With Christianity it is not so. It has within itself a living principle of recuperation and reformation.

It is exceedingly important to the end I have in view, to make it apparent what this reformatory power is; for nothing in Christianity more decisively proves its divine origin than this. The living principle that pervades the whole system and gives it indestructible vitality is the character, the life, the whole personality of its founder, Jesus the Christ. When he dwelt among men, never was one in human form so unappreciated as he. We have seen with what difficulty his twelve disciples, notwithstanding their intimacy with him, were made to understand him. That difficulty was at last overcome, and they have left in their records of him a true conception of the divine Master, which can never perish, "*monumentum ære perennius.*" Critics may think they have objections to the form in which these

records have come to us. What they may say of that matter must always be of very little weight. It will still remain true, that the unique and grand conception of Jesus the Christ lies embedded in these records, and never can be eliminated from them ; and in that conception is found the undying power of Christianity. This conception the apostles not only embodied in their records, but they impressed it in more or less of distinctness upon the minds of vast multitudes of men in their own generation, and by this means did much to render it a vital element of all the future. It might in a degree fade out from the minds of men in their successive generations, yet if we consult the records of the subsequent ages, we shall be filled with wonder at discovering how enduring it was in times of so much darkness and superstition. This is the bright side of the ante-Nicene church, and not only of it but of many darker and more corrupt ages that followed. On this side of the picture the mind of the Christian scholar may dwell with grateful exultation.

If however the influence of this conception had been left entirely to such personal transmission from age to age, it must have gradually faded out, and disappeared in the darkness of ignorance and superstition. It was not however and could not be so left. There was one cause which insured for it permanent and ever-increasing power. The church might be corrupted, and the hierarchy despotic ; but they could not be wholly unmindful of the foundation upon which they must always rest. That foundation never could be any other than the records which the apostles had left of Jesus and the resurrection. These therefore would be sacredly preserved. They might be shut out from the minds of the people by their inability to read them, and by the despotism of the hierarchy. But the priesthood could

not fail to recognize them as the original source of their power, and cherish them accordingly. Perhaps this is the principal reason why the learning of the ancient world was chiefly preserved in churches and monasteries. Even in the darkest times, there were many among the priests and monks who were acquainted with the New Testament in the Latin language, and it must always have exerted a powerful influence in preserving and transmitting from age to age some knowledge of Jesus Christ. With the revival of learning the Greek Testament was restored to Western Europe; and very widely attracted the attention of studious and learned men in all the universities and monasteries. The hierarchy might insist on its exclusive right to interpret the Bible, but as the eager and enthusiastic scholars of those ages studied these original records of Christianity, no authoritative interpretation could obliterate or obscure that original conception of the gospel which is imperishably embedded in those records. A knowledge of the genuine gospel of Christ was thus constantly increasing in obscure places, of which the leaders of the hierarchy had no suspicion. Light was springing up in the midst of darkness, and life in the midst of death.

The proof is overwhelming, that Jesus and his apostles were neither the selfish impostors nor the half-crazed enthusiasts they are represented to have been by the modern rejectors of supernatural Christianity. If they had been such, there could have been no such reformatory power still living in the very heart of the church, to recover and restore it to its original purity and power. The fact that there is in it such a power is decisive proof that these were the most truthful of men. None but true men could ever have represented to the world through eighteen centuries that conception of Jesus Christ the Son of God, which was the vital

force of the Reformation. If Jesus had not been the Christ, the apostles could never have made a representation of him which should have exerted such a power in the midst of surrounding darkness, and after so many dark and stormy ages. The hierarchy could make kings tremble on their thrones, but it could not arrest this silent influence of the gospel over the minds and hearts of men in the very bosom of the church, steadily preparing the way for that mighty upheaval in the moral and spiritual world, which is known as the Reformation. I have admitted and maintained that the early and long corruption of the church was inevitable. These considerations show, that in the fulness of time its reformation was no less inevitable.

For centuries before the occurrence of this great event, the indications of such an approaching revolution were manifest in many different countries of Europe. Of these the teachings and career of Wicklyffe in England, and of Huss in Bohemia, are among the most conspicuous. A longing for a purer gospel had extensively taken possession of the minds of men, and could only be repressed by the exertion of the utmost persecuting violence of the hierarchy. It was only by such repressive measures as those of the council of Constance, holding its sessions from 1414 to 1418, condemning and anathematizing the doctrines of Wicklyffe, and ordering his bones to be taken from consecrated ground and cast upon a dunghill, and condemning John Huss and Jerome of Prague to the flames for their alleged heresies, that the deep and widely prevalent discontent was for the present repressed. The doctrines and the practices of the hierarchy were judged and condemned by many of the most enlightened men of the age, by a standard which the hierarchy could neither understand nor abrogate. They were tried before a court which

had no earthly locality and no human representative, and which was to the powers which seemed to govern the world utterly invisible and intangible; yet it was soon to prove as irresistible as the lightnings of heaven. It was that judgment of the twelve apostles which Jesus had foretold when he promised that they should "sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Fourteen centuries had passed away, but that promise of the man Christ Jesus was still being mightily fulfilled.

What then was the Reformation? What was the aim and purpose of the heroic men who attempted and achieved it? What were the results which it accomplished? Accurately to answer these questions is of great importance to the purpose I have in hand. Wilson, in his "Outlines of History," much used as a textbook in our schools and colleges, says,¹ "The true causes of the Reformation are to be sought for in that undercurrent of social progress in which the human mind had long been laboring to accomplish its freedom." No conception of the subject could be more fatally erroneous. When liberty is sought as an end, it is seldom or never won. Had Luther and his co-reformers attacked the hierarchy in the name of liberty, had they simply demanded such changes in the constitution of the church and the hierarchy, as would have afforded necessary guarantees of freedom of thought and speech, nothing can be more certain than their utter and ignominious failure. They could not in that way have displaced the smallest stone in the vast ecclesiastical structure of the ages. Their attention was fixed on nothing of the sort. At the outset Luther and his friends had no quarrel with the organization of the church, and no thought of

¹ Wilson's Outlines, p. 788.

assailing it in any particular. The organic changes which the Reformation produced were entirely secondary. They were accepted as necessary, not sought for as originally desirable. Most of the reformers clung with tenacious affection to the idea of an œcumenical organization of the church, and relinquished it, when necessity compelled, with deep regret. In the beginning Luther had no quarrel with the supremacy of the pope ; and when at last he found the reigning pope irreconcilably hostile to his opinions, he proposed to appeal the matters in question to a general council, and that after the experience of the council at Constance, and the melancholy fate of John Huss and Jerome of Prague. He still cherished the fond hope, that he might yet avoid the sad necessity, as he regarded it, of a breach with the papal church. There may have been single exceptions to this, but such certainly was the general spirit and aim of the reformers.

The real aim of the reformers was to restore to the church, and proclaim afresh to the world, that gospel of Christ by which Christianity won its original victories, and acquired its influence in the world. The reformers had their own favorite forms of stating Christian doctrine, and they were not entirely agreed in them among themselves. They did not always see doctrinal questions in clear, unrefracted, uncolored light. Their modes of statement were variously modified by the speculative controversies which had amused and agitated men's minds through many preceding ages. But their object was one and simple. It was to restore to the church and the monastery the primitive gospel of Christ, and to use it as of old for the healing of the nations. It is often asserted, and I therefore suppose believed, by good men, that the papal church is orthodox. In a certain modified sense this may be true. Most or all

the essential doctrines of the gospel may perhaps be found in her recognized formularies. But she has done precisely that which our Lord charged the scribes and Pharisees with doing. She has made void the commandment of God by her tradition. She has so overlaid the whole gospel of Christ by her superstitious traditions, that it is to the great mass of men as much out of sight and knowledge as though it had never existed.

Let us illustrate this by an example. The immediate occasion of Luther's rupture with the Church of Rome was his controversy with Tetzal, in reference to the sale of indulgences. And what were indulgences? The pope as head of the church, and as having succeeded to Peter's keys of the kingdom of heaven, claimed to exercise over all christendom the power to absolve men from their sins, and to open to them the treasures of God's grace, or to hold them fast in the bonds of their iniquity, and to shut the kingdom of heaven against them. Leo X. then filled the papal chair. He was a pontiff of magnificent designs, and needed enormous sums of money to carry into execution his vast enterprises, especially for the erection of the church of St. Peter's at Rome, his prodigal patronage of art and learning, and to sustain the expenses of a war with the Turks. One of the methods which he adopted was, to send agents through all Europe, offering to sell in open market and at stipulated prices, remission of the penalties which men had incurred by their sins, whether those penalties were temporal or eternal; and not only for sins already committed, but for those which they were now committing, and even for those which they desired or intended to commit in the future. Of this traffic Tetzal was the principal agent in Germany. Luther's soul was filled with indignation at this infa-

mous traffic. Of what avail was it that the church still held to the doctrine of the remission of sins through the death of Christ on the cross, if any sinner could obtain from the agents of the pope a complete remission of the penalty due to his sins, for a pecuniary consideration? ¹ The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins through the cross of Christ was utterly nullified.

Or take another example. In the Douay Bible, the only English version of the Bible, the use of which the papal church allows to its members, the Greek word *μετανοέω* (repent) is uniformly translated, "do penance." Every one understands that to do penance means, that on confession of one's sins to the priest, he shall comply with the conditions of absolution which the priest imposes. Of what avail is it then that the formularies of the papal church contain the doctrine of repentance? In impression upon the great mass of mankind, she renders that doctrine utterly void by her traditions. Repentance means, confess your sins to the priest and receive forgiveness from him on such conditions as he imposes. These examples precisely illustrate the condition in which Luther and his co-reformers found the doctrine of Christ in the papal church. Recognized it might be in the dead and forgotten formularies of the church, but rendered utterly void by masses of superstitious tradition accumulated through the ages, and constantly enforced by immemorial custom, and the authoritative teachings of the priesthood. There was therefore a necessity that the reformers should purify the house of God, as the reforming kings of Israel did, and bring forth from the midst of this rubbish, under which it seemed hopelessly buried, the primitive gospel

¹ Mosheim's Church History, Hist. of Reformation, Chap. II., Sects. 7 and 9.

of Christ, and with primitive freedom of utterance proclaim it to the world.

This was what Luther attempted to do when with burning indignation he exposed the infamous teachings and practices of Tetzal. He aimed at religious truth. He and his friends sought a pure gospel, not mere liberty. When he attacked Tetzal, he had no thought of assailing the hierarchy or the supremacy of the Roman pontiff. If it is true, that the efforts of the reformers did result in a vast enlargement of the freedom of the human mind, and in the emancipation of a large portion of the Christian people of Germany and in several other European nations, from the supremacy of the pope and the domination of the papal hierarchy. In Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, England and Scotland, it led to the organization of national churches, all entirely independent of the papal hierarchy, and of each other, and in the rejection of immense masses of superstition which the priesthood had invented through so many ages. But these changes were all secondary, not primary. They were not originally aimed at or contemplated. The reformers sought religious truth as they had learned it from the New Testament. The papal hierarchy denied them the boon they sought, and attempted to repress their longings by the strong hand of power. They saw religious truth with such clearness and desired it with such fervor, as made them bold to resist the power that denied them the boon, however sacred they had hitherto regarded it, and to obey God rather than man though claiming to hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The more they contended for the simple gospel of Christ against the high pretensions of the papacy, the more they were led to discover the baselessness and arrogance of those pretensions, and made strong to

break off all connection with a so-called church so fatally corrupted. Thus, their efforts to obtain and enjoy a pure gospel revealed to them the terrible despotism under which they were living, and their need of emancipation, in order that without molestation they might serve God in the gospel of his Son. In this, as in so many other instances of the history of the world, an honest effort to obey God brought men out of bondage into the enjoyment of comparative liberty.

It follows from this view of the aims of the reformers, that they were likely to pursue their inquiries, in respect to the organization and government of the church, no further than was found to be necessary for the attainment of the great end they had in view. The object they were in pursuit of was Christian truth, not church polity. It was a pure gospel, not theories and limitations of church power. Nothing can be more creditable to the honest, devout integrity of the reformers than the fact, that their quarrel with the papacy was a contention for truth and righteousness before God, and not a question of mere church power. Of course I am aware that these remarks are not applicable to certain aspects of the English Reformation. So far as respects the relation of the English crown to the church, the question is a very different one, and will be duly considered in another place. It is enough for my present purpose, that in respect to the leaders of the Reformation in Germany and Switzerland, what has just been stated cannot be gainsaid. Church polity was secondary, and was pursued no further than was thought to be necessary to protect themselves in the enjoyment of a pure gospel. It was a conflict for truth, and not for power.

All the churches which were separated from the papacy at the Reformation relinquished entirely for the

time being the idea and the hope of a universal organic church. Such a conception was to them impossible to be realized. They did not abandon it, because they had ceased to love and cherish the conception, but because it had become utterly impracticable. In one respect the influence of the Reformation was strikingly analogous to that of the overthrow of the western Roman Empire. The empire had grown up to the vast magnitude which it attained in the times of Trajan and the Antonines, by uniting a great number of distinct independent municipalities into one great national whole, by irresistible Roman conquest. United by conquest, held together by irresistible imperial power, and compacted by the vigorous administration of Roman law, they presented for the time being something of the spectacle of one great homogeneous nationality. But as soon as the imperial bond that bound them together was dissolved, they had no power at all to reconstruct a centralizing power, and thus retain their national unity; but returned again to that condition of independent municipalities and states, in which they had existed before the Roman conquest.

The growth of the papal church was in some respects very analogous to the growth of the empire. It has been shown, and indeed is admitted by the ripest scholars of the most diverse schools of thought, that all the primitive churches were independent local societies, and that in that process of centralization and consolidation which was commenced soon after the end of the apostolic age, they were first combined under a growing prelatical influence into provincial and national communities, (using the term "national" of course in that restricted sense in which alone it could be employed, while the imperial power of Rome remained,) and that even in the second and third centuries this centraliza-

tion was to such an extent an accomplished fact, that that each nation or province had a recognized metropolitan primate. The churches had ceased to be, as in apostolic times, independent local communities. These had been absorbed into provincial or national churches. Then came the primacy of the bishop of Rome over them all. Vast, centralized, imperial power was a divinity which in those ages the world worshipped. Men made haste to construct the church after the same model which in the state had so long inspired awe and admiration. When the empire fell, and men saw with sickness of heart, that all that was magnificent in universal imperial power had irrecoverably perished, they eagerly sought to realize the same grand conception, in a church universal under the headship of the bishop of Rome.

For a thousand years, all the power and craft and statesmanship of the hierarchy were employed in consolidating by the forces which superstition supplies, the national and provincial churches of the early ages into a compact, universal church governed by the bishop of Rome, just as Roman legions had been employed in consolidating independent municipalities and states into the mighty structure of imperial Rome. When by the Reformation all the churches which had adopted the reformed ideas were forced to break the papal yoke from their necks, they were just as powerless to construct any new central power to unite them into a church universal, as the nations and municipalities which were united under the Roman Empire were, to retain their common nationality after the imperial tie had been dissolved. They returned by the necessity of the case to that condition of national churches, which had existed before the ghostly conquests of the bishop of Rome had been achieved. The reformers of

that time had not discovered, that the conception of a universal church organization, controlled and governed by human officials, is contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and contradictory of our Lord's solemn words, "My kingdom is not of this world." They abandoned it with no small sickness of heart, not from any conviction of its badness, but from inevitable necessity. In the literature of the times there are many expressions of regret of the separation of the reformed churches from each other, and of longing for some closer bond of union among them, and many efforts to accomplish what seemed to them so desirable.

The reason is therefore entirely obvious, why all the reformed churches retained their national church governments. There was no thought at that time of returning to the local independence which prevailed in the apostolic age. They would gladly have retained the œcumenical organization if they could; but as this was impossible, they eagerly clung to that national organic unity which was still in their power. Previous to the Reformation all these churches had been united under the headship of Rome. This tie was now broken, and that national unity with which they were under the necessity of contenting themselves, rendered a national headship also necessary. The clergy, accustomed to the headship of Rome, and not to national autonomy, more naturally looked to a head outside of their own body, and hesitated to take the government of the church into their own hands. It was a function they had never become accustomed to perform. On the other hand, the governments of Europe at that time had become for the most part absolute monarchies. Almost the only limitation of the power of the kings was the control which the pope exercised over the ecclesiastical affairs of the nations. From this control

the Reformation liberated them, and they eagerly undertook to exercise such an oversight of the national churches as had now become a universally felt necessity, and the kings became supreme in ecclesiastical as well as in civil affairs. To a considerable extent the powers which the Roman Cæsar had lost, the secular, national Cæsar acquired.

Thus came into being the church and state system of Protestant Europe. The reformers keenly felt the necessity of lodging somewhere those powers which the state exercised over their churches. The birth of absolute religious freedom was not yet. It was a result which must sooner or later spring from the Reformation, but its time had not yet come. The reformers could not conceive of it. They could not understand that Christianity could prosper without a strongly organized and governed church, or without the presence of a strong and vigorous hand, ready at all times to repress dissent, and enforce uniformity of faith and worship. It was a bad lesson which had penetrated the very soul of all christendom, enforced by all the usages and precedents of a thousand years of spiritual despotism. It could only be unlearned by generations of providential teaching, under the influence of the doctrines of the Reformation. If Luther and Calvin and their associates could have foreseen, that from the Reformation there would ultimately result such a condition of absolute religious freedom as that which now exists in this country, with all the consequences of sectarian conflict, rivalry, weakness and anarchy which we experience from it, they would have been utterly appalled at the prospect, and I know not but the fear of it would have driven them back with haste into the bosom of the papal church. They could not foresee what we, if we are wise, have learned by experience, — that absolute religious

liberty even with all these evils is infinitely preferable to the exercise of any restraint whatever upon faith, worship and conscience. Even Richard Baxter, a century and a half later than these times, with all the devoutness and amiableness of his character, would have endured martyrdom rather than renounce his faith in the duty of the civil magistrate to enforce the unity and purity of the national church by appropriate laws and penalties. No proposition could have been made to the leaders of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, which would have seemed to them more unworthy of a moment's consideration, than to open all the flood-gates of dissent, by establishing absolute religious liberty. It would have seemed to them just as absurd, as to constitute the state without any civil head having the power to compel submission and obedience. If any one will not recognize this, as the standpoint from which the reformers almost necessarily regarded this whole subject, he can do them no justice.

In the construction of these national churches, so far as the principles and usages of the papal church had been seen to be superstitious and unscriptural, they were rejected. Otherwise they were of course retained. There was in this respect in the national churches of different countries great diversity, according to the wisdom and insight of the men who in the several countries led the movement, the peculiar circumstances of each country, and perhaps still more the taste, whims and caprices of the ruling sovereigns. In some countries, in England, for example, the episcopate was retained with little modification. In others it was retained in only a very modified form. In other countries still, it was entirely rejected, and the doctrine of the parity of the clergy was avowed. A similar disparity existed in respect to the rites, ceremonies and liturgy

of the papal church. Some rejected them altogether. Others retained them in greater or less degree, according to the tastes of the leading reformers in each country, and of the men in civil power. There was therefore very great diversity in the constitution and forms of worship of the several national reformed churches, and it will be seen as we proceed that, though this diversity seemed of little importance at the time, it was to exert no small influence on the future of Protestantism.

In the midst of all this diversity, there were two questions, the importance of which has been made apparent in the previous chapters of this volume, in respect to which the reformed churches were perfectly unanimous. They all regarded a clergy qualified for their sacred functions by the laying on of hands, as essential to the very existence of the church. If in the discussions of the times this was seriously called in question, I am not aware of it ; or if it was sometimes called in question in the half-crazed theories of enthusiasts, the doubt was never regarded by the leading reformers as worthy of any consideration. Like the national organization of the church, it was accepted as a matter of necessity, neither requiring nor admitting of argument. There was nothing in the circumstances of the times to raise any question about it, or to call for any reinvestigation of it. The doctrine had come down unquestioned from the remote Christian antiquity of the second and third centuries, and there was nothing to suggest to the men of that age, that there was any occasion to call it in question.

Equally unanimous were the reformers in their undoubting belief that baptism and the Lord's Supper were only to be exhibited to the people as sacraments administered by a clergy, exclusively qualified for the

performance of that function by the laying on of hands. There was not one of the reformed churches which did not retain, in some form, the power of the keys. In every one of them some clerical or ecclesiastical guardianship of baptism and the Lord's Supper, some churchly power to admit to them and exclude from them, to open and to shut the door of the kingdom of heaven, was retained with scrupulous care. This view of the case was unanimously retained in the reformed churches, not because the question had been thoroughly examined and all had come to the same conclusion, but because the circumstances of the times had never raised the question. The power of the keys was retained just as the national organization of the church was retained, as a matter of necessity and of course, the contrary of which was not to be thought of.

The Reformation left three questions precisely where it found them: viz., the national centralization of the church instead of local independency, a clergy exclusively qualified for certain sacred functions by the laying on of hands, and a corporate guardianship of baptism and the Lord's Supper, invested with authority to admit to them and exclude from them. It is certainly very well worthy of the consideration of the reader, that it has been, I think, already conclusively shown, that each of these three doctrines was firmly rooted in the church of the second and third centuries, and was a germ from which the mediæval church grew. It was also shown with equal clearness, that each of them is a doctrine in respect to which the ante-Nicene church stood in clear and strong contrast with the church of the apostles. There is no trace of them in the apostolic records. They owed their origin to the corrupted Judaism and the paganism from which the church in that early age received such vast accessions of numbers. We have

seen what that influence was on the growth and maturity of the papacy. We are yet to see in the progress of this work, what their influence has been on Protestantism in the first three centuries and a half of its history. If to the three elements of the ante-Nicene church just enumerated as unanimously retained by the Protestant churches, we add a fourth which was retained by one of the Protestant national organizations, and that one perhaps, all things considered, the most influential of them all,—the hierarchal organization of the clergy in three orders,—we shall have in our hand the key to the history of Protestantism from the Reformation to the present time, and to its present strangely anomalous condition. To apply that key to the solution of the problems which are presented by the past history of Protestantism, and in its present aspects, is the task I hope to accomplish in the remaining portion of this volume. I also indulge the cheerful hope that the use of that key will open before us a clear path to a church of the future in glorious contrast in all things to the church of Hildebrand and the papacy, and as much brighter and better than the church of that transition period through which we have been passing since the Reformation, as the entrance of Israel into the promised land was better than his long wanderings in the great and terrible wilderness. No man regards the Reformation with more grateful exultation and admiring reverence than I do. In it were the seeds of all that is bright and precious in the coming destinies of the church of God. But it is to be regarded not as the completed, but only as the begun Reformation from the great apostasy. There yet remaineth much old leaven to be purged away. In some very important respects the church of the Reformation bears the lineaments of its papal mother. It must reject them all, and be-

come again the church of the apostles and of Jesus Christ.

The reader must not understand me to maintain in this chapter, that the reformers retained that extreme interpretation of the power of the keys, which was and is still held in the papal church, — that the church has power over the future and eternal destiny of the soul. This is utterly at variance with the doctrines of Protestantism. But if our Lord requires all his followers to observe the Christian rites, and has given to the church in its corporate capacity the power to exclude from participation in them, that is a mighty instrument of government, and must greatly modify the constitution of all forms of the church that retain it. In this form the reformed churches did retain it, as a fundamental principle in their constitutions. It gives character to all Protestant church government.

CHAPTER IV.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

IN using this phrase, it is necessary to see to it that we employ it with exactness and precision. Many discussions are fatally vitiated by the vague and indefinite use of it. When I affirm, that religious liberty is a universal human right, I mean to affirm, that each individual human being is surrounded by a sphere of moral and spiritual relations, within which he owes allegiance directly to God; and that within that sphere no human power may rightfully restrain his thought, his will, his action. In the beginnings of infancy, this sphere of individual personality is not yet developed. The infant gradually comes into it by his progress in personal consciousness, in knowledge, in sense of moral obligation, and in individual will. With this progress in personal development, the right of the parent to control within this sphere of individuality gradually fades out and disappears. There are many cases indeed, in which the development of individuality is at maturity so imperfect, that the being has little consciousness of power to decide independently and for himself the grave questions on which his destiny depends. He is greatly conscious of the necessity of relying on the guiding influence of minds stronger than his own. But there is one prerogative of which even these feeble minds cannot be deprived. They have a

right, and are bound by the necessity of the case to elect for themselves the minds by which they will be guided, and this prerogative cannot be rightfully taken from them.

It is important in this place to guard against a common misunderstanding. Some men grievously complain, that their religious liberty is infringed, if at any time they suffer any loss of moral reputation in consequence of their holding or rejecting any religious opinions whatever. They seriously set up the claim, that if one's life is only right, he forfeits nothing of his claim to the respect and confidence of the Christian community by the rejection and denial of any doctrine of religion, however fundamental and sacred. This is not the doctrine of religious liberty which is advocated in these pages. In civil affairs, we justly abhor the man who advocates opinions which are subversive of all social order. We regard the teaching of such doctrines as inconsistent with good morals. In like manner, if I accept the Christian religion as the hope and salvation of the human race, I must regard with strong moral disapprobation the man that rejects it, and seeks to destroy its influence in the world. By entertaining and openly manifesting such disapprobation, I commit no violation of his rights, and am guilty of no infringement of his liberty. Freedom of thought is sacred, but under the government of God there is no such thing as freedom either of thought or action, with exemption from moral responsibility for its use. We all intuitively recognize such a responsibility in our estimates of each other. We all perceive indeed that we have no right to call men to account for the use they make of the power of thought, and that that is the prerogative of God alone. But in our own estimate of each other, we cannot avoid anticipating that judgment of God. To

do so is no violation of the rights of conscience. Such a violation only exists when we attempt to control a man's opinions by standing between him and God, and for opinion's sake excluding him from privileges which God has given him. The church of Christ was not designed to be so constituted that, in the discharge of its legitimate functions it could ever for a moment intrude within the sacred sphere of the soul's direct allegiance to God. If God has summoned the whole world to faith in Christ, and required all believers devoutly to observe the Lord's Supper, then the observance of it lies within that sacred sphere, and the church cannot claim to hold the key to that rite without usurping authority over individual conscience. The gospel cannot be rejected without sin ; but for that sin the culprit must give account to God, and not to the church, or to any human tribunal. This is religious liberty.

Within this sacred sphere of obligation and conscience the doctrine of Christianity is, that no human authority can intrude. It is a sphere absolutely sacred, within which the individual soul meets God alone. It matters not under what pretence any other human will intrudes within it. If it is the civil ruler, he becomes by the very act of intrusion a usurper of the prerogative of God. If another human will intrudes within this sphere under pretence of ecclesiastical authority, we may know that the pretence is a sham and a lie. It has already been shown in a former part of this work¹ with what jealous care the individual allegiance of every man to God was guarded in the constitution of the Mosaic economy and priesthood. It was also shown that in every successive step in the manifestation of the Messiah to the world, this same direct allegiance of

¹ Chap. II, Part I.

every man to God was assumed and recognized. The Messianic kingdom is built upon it. It was also shown, that if the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper had been committed by Jesus Christ to a self-perpetuating priestly corporation, to be by them alone dispensed to the faithful in all ages, it would have been an arrangement fatally subversive of this fundamental doctrine of the religion of the Bible.

It has also been shown, that, in the church of the second and third centuries, those rites were thus committed to a priestly corporation organized into a hierarchy of three orders.¹ It was also subsequently shown,² that from this germ grew the mighty structure of the mediæval church. Nothing can be more absolute than the negation and annihilation of this doctrine of religious liberty in the church of Hildebrand, and that of Leo X., against which Luther and his associates proclaimed their solemn protest. It is equally denied and annihilated in the church of Leo XIII. and Cardinal Archbishop Manning. According to the doctrines of that church, every man does indeed owe direct moral and religious allegiance to God, and not to the civil state; but that allegiance is due to God only through the pope and the papal hierarchy. No sacred sphere surrounds any human soul, within which that hierarchy is not authorized to interfere in the name and with the authority of God, and demand submission in respect to every item of judgment, worship, conscience and action. According to that system, God has so constituted certain men in certain official positions his earthly vicegerents, that no man can render allegiance to God except through these human representatives. Over all humanity they are lords of conscience. Precisely to

¹ Chap. VII.

² Chap. VIII.

this extent has the papal church in all ages stood in open, impious defiance of the fundamental principles of the Bible, both under the old dispensation and the new.

Against this impious usurpation of the authority of God over the soul of man, the Reformation placed itself in the attitude of stern and solemn rebuke. The whole movement is one solemn assertion of direct allegiance to God, in defiance of all the arrogant claims of pope and hierarchy. There can perhaps be no better illustration and proof of this than the conduct and words of the master spirit of that great revolution before the Diet of Worms. "When confronted with the brilliant assembly of the emperor, the princes and nobles of the empire, the dignitaries of the church, and an immense concourse of spectators, and called upon to recant, he boldly defended his doctrines, and made the memorable declaration: Unless I shall be refuted and convinced by testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, or by public, clear, and evident arguments and reasons, I cannot and will not retract anything, since I believe neither the pope nor the councils alone, both of them having evidently often erred and contradicted themselves, and since it is neither safe nor advisable to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand, I cannot otherwise ; God help me ! Amen."

There can be no difficulty in understanding the attitude of Luther on this momentous occasion. He had a clear and vivid intuition of the fundamental truth, that his moral and religious allegiance was due directly to God, without the intervention of any human representative. That profoundest conviction of his soul he avowed in presence of the emperor and the Diet, as his sufficient justification for refusing to submit the points at issue to the pope or to any earthly tribunal. It was an affair of conscience and therefore lay directly be-

tween him and God. This intuition of personal religious liberty was the one consideration by which he and his associates justified the insurrection they were raising against that established authority of the church, which had stood almost unquestioned for several hundred years. By the same consideration they justified to themselves and to the world the act of separating the Christian people of many different countries from all connection with the papal church, and organizing the churches of the Reformation. Every one of those churches by its organic act practically avowed that very doctrine of religious liberty which Luther so eloquently asserted for himself before the Diet of Worms. Probably no one of them recognized it in their organic law, or respected it in their treatment of individuals. But it is none the less true, that it is the common foundation on which they are all built. Their very existence implied and assumed it, and created a logical necessity, that sooner or later it should be openly recognized and practically applied.

Many writers of great ability and great influence over the public mind seem to me to have fallen into a fatal mistake in their treatment of this subject. In relation to religious liberty, they cannot see that Protestantism has any advantage over the papal church. Neither party respected religious liberty in practice. Both compelled submission to the established church by the strong hand of power. Both are chargeable with the shameful crime of persecuting men for their religious opinions, or at least for avowing them and acting upon them. Some go so far as to tell us, that the advantage on the whole is with the papal party, for they are consistent with their avowed principles. The papal church, we are told, has been constructed for ages upon the principle, that the head of the church has unlimited con-

trol conferred by God himself over all individual conscience ; and that therefore when it resorts to persecution, it acts consistently with itself, and applies its own fundamental principles in practice. Protestantism on the other hand, when it resorts to persecution, is fatally inconsistent with itself. It refuses to concede to the rest of mankind that religious liberty of which its very existence is a solemn assertion.

It cannot be denied that when Protestants persecute, they are guilty of just such an inconsistency. A persecuting Protestant church commits suicide. It denies its own right to be. The papal church is chargeable with no such inconsistency. It is in its own nature, and by virtue of its own fundamental principles, consistently and tenaciously held, the enemy of the religious liberty of mankind. But it seems strange that learned and able men should fail to perceive, that this consistency of the papal church is a stigma of lasting reproach, and that this inconsistency of Protestantism is, in a comparison of the two systems, an imperishable badge of honor. It may be said and often has been, that the leaders of Protestantism were hypocritical, that they refused to concede to others those rights which they claimed for themselves. This it is said is a strange anomaly. The reply is, it is no anomaly at all ; or if an anomaly, it is so common as to take away all its strangeness. Luther before the Diet of Worms had a sublime intuition of his own rights of conscience as an individual subject of the government of God. If it is asked, why he did not equally perceive that all other men have the same rights, the answer is very obvious. Psychologists tell us, that there are certain truths which in their application to particular cases all men intuitively perceive, while very few ever generalize them and assert their universality. There is, for example, no man who, on

perceiving that some change has taken place in the material things around him, does not intuitively perceive, that that change must be due to some adequate cause. If a tree is found standing where a little while before there was no tree, he knows some hand must have planted it. If an hour ago on leaving his room he knows that his watch was on the table, but on returning he finds it not there, he is sure some hand must have taken it away. But, the number of men who generalize this intuition, and assert the universal truth, that every change is caused, is very small.

The same thing holds true in a pre-eminent degree of our moral intuitions. Between that clear discernment of his own rights of conscience which Luther so grandly affirmed on the occasion referred to, and the generalization of that intuition into the universal law of religious liberty, there is a long step of social progress, which experience shows that it often requires generations to accomplish. The fact that Luther and his associates discerned that intuition in its application to a particular case, but did not generalize it, does not prove that they were hypocrites, but only that they were subject to those weaknesses and limitations which attach to all humanity. The framers of the Declaration of Independence were not proved to be hypocrites by the fact, that they declared that "men have certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," while yet hundreds of thousands of their fellow-citizens were reduced by existing laws to the condition of chattels and beasts of burden. The existence of that declaration in the document in which the beginning of our national life was announced to the world, is justly regarded as one of the most glorious facts in our national history. Its insertion in that document was not an act of hypocrisy, but an honest asser-

tion of a great truth to which the history of the nation was to give practical effect.

The reformers never thought of denying the right of the papal church to require and compel men to accept the truth of God. They had no generalization, as has been shown, of the intuition of moral freedom. What they complained of was, not the assumed right to legislate in a matter of conscience, but that the doctrines imposed on them by authority were not the truth of God, but impious falsehoods. They were entirely sure that they themselves discerned them to be falsehoods, and therefore refused to accept them in obedience to any human authority. If the pope would have listened to their arguments, and made those changes in the doctrines and practices of the church which they saw to be necessary, it would never have occurred to them to demand that he should renounce his right to legislate in matters of conscience. This they had never called in question. When therefore it became necessary to construct the reformed churches, no doubt ever occurred to them of their right to reject the errors of the papacy, and to give legal effect to an ecclesiastical system constructed, as they intended theirs should be, in accordance with the word of God. They had separated themselves from the papal church because it sought to impose on them, in the name of Christianity, a system of doctrine which they saw to be false and impious. They intended to give to the people of the countries in which they organized national churches no such justification of dissent. It never occurred to them that their refusal to accept the false system on the authority of the papal church was inconsistent with requiring men to submit to a true system on the authority of a Protestant church, or that other men would rightfully claim to exercise that private judgment in relation to the doctrines of

Protestantism, which they had claimed for themselves in their conflict with the pope. They were honest and sincere in their assertion of it, but they saw it only as an individual right, not as a generalization.

This assertion of the doctrine of religious liberty by which the reformers justified their own conduct was not only honest and sincere, but it committed the Reformation to that principle for all the future; and the overruling providence of God has well-known methods of so holding communities and nations to such commitments, as to render escape from them impossible. This is strikingly proved by our own national history. It is true that the Declaration of Independence liberated no slaves. It is true that, for more than fifty years after the publication of that declaration, the number of slaves in our country increased with terrible rapidity, and the bondage in which they were held became more rigorous and cruel. Again and again the rulers and legislators of the nation entered into solemn league and covenant to make the iniquity perpetual. Yet it is also true, that the insertion of that declaration of human rights in the charter of the nation's existence did actually secure, in the progress of events, universal personal liberty over every foot of our territory. The providence of God brought us at length to a crisis, when we must make our election, whether to cease from being a nation, or fulfil our pledges of universal liberty. Irresistible necessity compelled us to choose the latter.

It is always so in respect to those commitments given by communities in favor of fundamental laws of righteousness. The providence of God never permits them to remain a dead letter. This is most strikingly true of those recognitions of the doctrine of religious liberty, which occurred in the origin of Protestantism. They rendered it inevitable that, in the progress of the ages,

Protestantism would be found on the side of liberty of conscience, just as the commitments of the papal church in the same conflicts, in favor of the enslavement of the human conscience to the authority of the papal hierarchy, compelled that church to remain the perpetual enemy of religious liberty, and bear as best she can all the consequences of the position she has chosen.

The causes which are constantly compelling all Protestant churches to accept and practically apply that doctrine of religious liberty which is implied in their very existence are obvious and irresistible. There are two reasons why they have acted with much less rapidity in the churches of the Continent, than in those of England and Scotland. One of those reasons is, that in the Continental churches the Reformation originated in a few leading minds, and was achieved by them in co-operation with the reigning sovereigns. The mass of the people had only to accept with enthusiasm the boon which was provided for them by their sovereigns and their spiritual guides. It was not a product of any popular uprising. In England, so far as the Reformation was political, the people were far enough from any participation in it; but by far the more powerful element was not political, but popular and personal, resulting from profound individual conviction. The seeds which Wicklyffe had planted a hundred and fifty years earlier could never be eradicated from English soil. They were the germs of the English Reformation. The great movement on the Continent only quickened them to a more active and vigorous growth. This deep popular element was never for a moment satisfied with such scanty reformation as Henry VIII. and the bishops were disposed to grant. From the first there was deep dissatisfaction with a semi-papal church, and a widely prevalent longing for a radically reformed church. The

nation was never for a moment at rest under the national church which her original Reformation gave her, and new outbreaks of dissent were of almost constant occurrence.

The other reason why the progress of practical religious liberty was comparatively slow on the Continent is to be found in the fact, that the governments were for the most part absolute and independent of the popular will. For this reason dissent had few opportunities of organizing itself, so as to offer any formidable resistance to authority. It was therefore easily repressed, and the Protestant national church exercised universal control, and enjoyed a tranquil existence for several generations. Greater religious liberty was not granted, because it was never energetically demanded. In Britain it was far otherwise. The English Tudors and Stuarts were despotic enough in spirit, but they could never be absolute in fact. The monarchy was never strong enough to repress that deep ground-swell of popular conviction, which never ceased to demand a thoroughly reformed church. The earnest masses from whence this demand proceeded had as clear an intuition of their right of private judgment against the church of Henry VIII., as Luther had against the Church of Rome. That conviction was deepened and strengthened by all the precedents of the Reformation. When Henry VIII. sent a papist to execution for denying his supremacy, the Protestant masses vividly felt that the Protestant who was borne to execution in the same hurdle for denying transubstantiation, had as good right to reject the doctrines of a king as the king had to put men to death for adhering to the pope. This conviction must and did fasten itself deeply upon the mind of the nation, and became a permanent force in English history, compelling the government and the state church to yield

more and more to the demands of religious liberty. The advocates of a more thorough church reform were often obliged to assert their right of private judgment on the scaffold and at the stake. But when called to preach their doctrine of religious liberty from such pulpits, they appealed with all the more power to that original assertion of it, which the very existence of the Reformation implied, and deepened the conviction of its truth in the heart of the nation. From the first it was impossible that the English Reformation should ever enjoy an hour of tranquillity, except in the universal practical recognition of religious liberty. Much the same may be said of the history of religious liberty in Scotland.

This long conflict in England, lasting for three centuries, resulted not only in the complete establishment of the principle in that country, but in making it a part of the fundamental law of society among all the populations of the world which have sprung from English colonization. The vast prevalence of absolute religious liberty over regions of the earth so extensive, and among populations so prosperous and wealthy is a result of the English Reformation; and it is a fact scarcely less important and promising of beneficent results than any other in modern history. As has been already stated, for the most part the progress of religious liberty in the Protestant countries of Continental Europe has been less rapid; but it has been real, and promises ere long to become universal and complete. It is surely a matter of wonder, that any well-informed man can fail to perceive, that in respect to religious liberty, the two systems which met each other face to face on the battle-fields of the Reformation have ever since, by a necessity of their own natures, been moving onward toward results the most contradictory. The papal power represents the

enslavement of the conscience of man to the pope and the hierarchy ; and in every country it is unfailingly true to its fundamental law. If it can grasp and hold the sword of Cæsar, it never fails to wield it to repress dissent, and compel the submission of the reluctant. If the sword has fallen from its grasp, it still boasts that it holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and compels the submission of reluctant wills by ghostly terrors, and its control of the destinies of the invisible world.

Protestantism on the other hand is irretrievably committed by its own first principle to religious liberty. Protestant churches may violate it, and often have done so ; but sooner or later they will be compelled to recognize it. In the beginning of the war of the Rebellion our armies sometimes trampled on the rights of the negroes ; but those men, degraded as they were, knew instinctively that in the long run the Federal government must protect their rights. There is in Protestantism a similar necessity of protecting religious liberty. Its origin and its history give full assurance, that wherever it bears rule, religious liberty must become the fundamental law of society. Protestantism means the enfranchisement of the conscience, just as the papal church means its enslavement.

PART III.

THE CHURCH OF MODERN CHRISTENDOM.

CHAPTER I.

THE ORIGIN OF MODERN SECTS.

THE words placed at the head of this chapter suggest to the mind a class of phenomena which are certainly among the most characteristic, and I think all will admit the most painful to contemplate, which we encounter in studying the history of Protestantism. They are unique. They are not like the early sects of Christianity. These were for the most part parties within the body of the church itself, not separate organizations, each claiming to be the church or at least a church of Christ. Any one may satisfy himself of this by consulting the histories of those controversies in any of the standard works on church history.¹ As a consequence of this fact, all those sects were of comparatively short duration. They were conflicts in the bosom of the church, and came to an end by one party or the other, by fair means or foul, gaining entire ascendancy. It is unnecessary to waste words in showing how widely this differs from the aspect under which we see sect in our

¹ Waddington's Ch Hist., Chap. VII., "Arian Controversy."

own times. Nor are there any similar phenomena in the long interval between these early controversies and the Reformation. There is indeed the great schism between the Eastern and Western churches. But each of these bodies set up the exclusive claim of being the church of Christ, and anathematized the other. Each regarded the other as a rebellion and a usurpation. There are among the sects of Protestantism some similar cases, but they are by no means numerous. This is not the prevailing attitude of Protestant sects towards each other.

It is my design in this chapter to inquire into the origin and causes of this peculiar order of things, which it must be admitted very extensively prevails among the Christian people that adopt the principles of the Reformation. The reader will at once recognize this as one of the most common topics of popular declamation, both from the pulpit and the platform. It is also a favorite theme of our periodical literature, both papal and Protestant, both secular and religious. It may generally be remarked however that the subjects most discussed are the subjects least understood, just as there are no diseases for which quacks propound so many infallible remedies, as for those which in relation to our present knowledge, are quite incurable. The very frequency with which men return again and again to the discussion of this threadbare subject is a striking proof that the public mind is ill at ease in respect to it, and that men are by no means satisfied with any of the numerous solutions of the question which have thus far been proposed. This consideration may be a salutary warning to a wise man, that he can have no hope of success where so many have failed ; but it at least gives one the assurance, that the public mind is unsatisfied, and longing for truth which has not yet been

discovered. While this state of facts continues, the discussion of the subject cannot cease.

A very large majority of all those who write and speak on the subject would be perfectly unanimous in the belief that it is not necessary to look far to discover the causes of these phenomena. They tell us with the utmost assurance, that the religious divisions of our times are due to two causes : religious liberty, and the necessary limitations of all human knowledge ; that as no human mind has a perfect knowledge of anything, it is impossible any two minds should have exactly the same view of any subject ; and that therefore, if men enjoy liberty of thought and speech, they will be divided into parties and sects on all subjects, religion not excepted. He who accepts this as a full account of the matter demonstrates at least the shallowness of his own thinking. Such considerations may account for the existence of great diversity of religious *opinion*, but afford no explanation at all of the phenomena of religious sects, as we daily witness them.

If the existence of great diversity of opinion were alone adequate to explain the present sectarian condition of Protestantism in all countries where religious freedom is enjoyed, then ought the same cause to produce similar phenomena in respect to all other questions which deeply affect human thought and human well-being. The medical profession for example should present sects in all respects analogous to those of Christianity. But he has studied the subject very superficially who does not perceive that such is by no means the fact. Great diversities of opinion on medical subjects there certainly are, perhaps as great as on religious subjects. Among intelligent, educated physicians there are perhaps two or three great schools of opinion, so irreconcilable to each other, that those who hold them

refuse any intercommunion as members of a common profession. But these differences originate at the bedside of the patient. Physicians of the different schools have no professional fellowship with each other, because they cannot, so long as what one relies on as the means of saving life and restoring health, the other believes to be quite useless or positively injurious. There are religious divisions of the same character, and where such differences of opinion exist, it is plain there can be no religious fraternity or co-operation. There ought to be none. But he who supposes that this expresses the state of facts which for the most part exists between different Protestant sects, has surely viewed the subject very superficially, and at a very great distance. He has not sufficiently studied the phenomena of the religious life of our times to form any trustworthy opinion of them. In most cases the fact lies upon the very surface of things, that the diversities of opinion which separate the different religious sects from each other are not regarded on either side as pertaining to the essential nature of Christianity, or as sustaining any very important relation to the great end which Christianity aims to accomplish, the reformation and salvation of sinful men. It is a most familiar and common occurrence, that when the Christian bodies in any community become deeply impressed with the necessity of putting forth extraordinary efforts to persuade men to repent, by the vigorous application of the great reformatory forces of Christianity, they deliberately, for the time being, forget the differences which divide them from one another, and glory in the fact, that faith and fervor for the common truth have risen so high, that the landmarks of sect can nowhere be discerned. They exult in the fact, that they have all a common salvation. Around the bedside of men sick and dying of the disease

of sin, they have no diversities of opinion, they have a common remedy and a common faith in it. As soon as this season of extraordinary effort is past, the waters will recede to their ordinary level, and the landmarks of sect will be everywhere discernible as before.

Can a parallel be found for these facts in the medical profession? Do homœopathic and allopathic practitioners, when impelled by a sense of the necessity of extraordinary effort to protect the health and save the lives of the people, as for example when pestilence invades, quite forget their differences, and unite in common endeavor, and the use of the same remedies? Every one knows that in such circumstances professional antipathies are peculiarly strong, because each school thinks the other is destroying the lives of the people. Besides these differences of opinion on fundamental points which render co-operation impossible, there are in the medical profession innumerable minor diversities of opinion, which have no tendency at all to impair its unity. If there were among Christians no causes tending to divide them into sects, other than the limitations of human knowledge, and the freedom of thought and opinion, the phenomena of the religious world would be precisely analogous to those of the medical profession. Fundamental differences in respect to the nature of the remedy which God has provided for the moral diseases of men would occasion permanent and incurable divisions; and the more earnest Christian people were in efforts to promote the moral health of the community, the more irreconcilable those divisions would appear. Innumerable diversities of opinion on points of minor importance would have no tendency to break out into permanent schisms, or to impair the oneness of the Christian brotherhood. Our illustration has been drawn from the medical profession,

but any other department of human thought and effort could have supplied it.

Partial ignorance therefore in the midst of perfect freedom furnishes no explanation of the phenomena of religious sect as we are acquainted with them. We must find some other cause or causes, or acknowledge ourselves ignorant of the subject. We shall find those causes nowhere but in the past history of Christianity. Modern sect originated where the spiritual despotism of the Middle Ages originated, in the corruption of Christianity in the early ages of its history. Both these phenomena grew from the same roots and the same seeds. I am not sanguine enough to expect this proposition to be believed without proof.

If it is conceded that the Founder of Christianity made it clearly apparent, that he intended to place the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the hands of a self-perpetuating priestly corporation, to be by them dispensed to the people, and made it easy in every successive age to determine who are the genuine successors of the original corporators, then no such phenomena as those of Protestant sect would have been possible. The refusal of any number of people professing themselves to be Christians to submit to the authority of that corporation would have been obvious rebellion against the head and supreme law of the church universal. All persons so refusing would have renounced their membership in the church of Christ, and excluded themselves from all its privileges. They would not have been Christian but anti-Christian sects.

On the other hand, if it is conceded that the Founder of Christianity never instituted any such corporation, or gave any hint that it was his wish or intention that it should exist, if he committed the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper to no priestly hands, but enjoined

their free observance by all Christian people as badges of loyalty to him, without the intervention of any priestly administration, then also the phenomena of modern sect would have been impossible. Wide differences of opinion would have existed, and some of them would have been so fundamental as to render mutual co-operation and recognition impossible. From these differences permanent separation would have resulted into irreconcilable sects ; and the more earnest men were to apply Christianity as an instrument for producing its appropriate results, the more irreconcilable these differences would have appeared. Such divisions in respect to Christianity it would have been neither possible nor desirable to avoid. In spiritual as in carnal warfare, it is eminently desirable that men should have the power of distinguishing friends from foes.

Besides these fundamental differences of opinion, there would still have been innumerable minor diversities, but they would have had no more tendency to divide believers in Christ into rival sects, as we see them divided, than the minor disagreements of physicians among themselves have to produce a like factious condition of the medical profession. For example, one man might have thought that in the act of baptism the whole body should be immersed, while another was of the opinion that to apply water by sprinkling or pouring was equally appropriate and more convenient. Each would have acted according to his own conviction, and such a difference of opinion would have had no tendency to hinder the most perfect fraternization of those who held them.

Once more, if it is conceded that the Founder of Christianity intended to place the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper in such a sense under the guardianship of some ecclesiastical corporation, that that corpo-

ration should have the power of binding and loosing as it is understood, that it should hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven as that language has been so often interpreted, that no one could gain admission to these Christian rites except through such a corporation; and if at the same time he laid down no definite rules, no organic principles according to which such a corporation should be constituted, no definition of its powers and no delineation of the method by which they should be exercised, then would all the phenomena of Protestant sect become inevitable and perpetual. In other words, if Jesus Christ required the existence in his church of a corporation with such judicial powers, and yet entirely neglected to define the constitution of that corporation and the limitations of its powers, then he himself became responsible for all the phenomena of Protestant sect. He planted the seed and it was sure to spring up and bear fruit after his kind. For example, under this order of things a majority of the corporation that holds the keys are of the opinion that sprinkling is the more convenient mode of applying water in baptism, and therefore requires that it shall be so applied. A minority of the brotherhood holds that sprinkling is not baptism, and therefore withdraws from the brotherhood and organizes another corporation to hold the keys which will admit no baptism but immersion, and suffer none but the immersed to participate in the Lord's Supper. Thus two sects have originated differing in nothing but in the mode of applying water in baptism; and yet experience shows that these two sects are likely not only to stand over against each other for ages, but to produce a schism in the Christian body wherever religious liberty exists. It is not religious liberty, but a false interpretation of the phrase, "keys of the kingdom of heaven," which has

rendered this melancholy division of the Lord's people possible.

It is important however to observe that it is not necessary to the accomplishment of this separation, that both parties should retain the power of the keys. It will equally take place if one of them insists on this power, while the other rejects it. If for example in the case given above one party debars from the Lord's Supper all persons who have not been immersed, while the other party refuses to submit to immersion but throws no barrier in the way of any disciple of Christ who wishes to honor him in the observance of this rite, in whatever manner he may have received baptism, the separation will be just as complete and permanent as though both parties insisted on the power of the keys. But there will be this important difference in the two cases. If both had retained the power of the keys, both would be equally responsible for causing and perpetuating the schism. If one of the parties has usurped no control over the Christian rites, it will have cleared itself of all responsibility for the separation, and also of any liability to create new schisms in its own body by the usurpation of lordship over the consciences of its members. This principle must always be borne in mind in estimating the responsibility of any Christian body for being separated by sectarian lines from other Christian people.

Whichever of the distinct religious bodies which divide, not only Protestant countries but all christendom, is subjected to analysis, we shall find at its root a germ on which its existence depends; and that germ will always be an assumed control of the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper by the exercise of corporate power, and with very few exceptions the assumption is also made that these rites can only be exhibited by the

exercise of a clerical function for the performance of which ordination by the laying on of hands is a necessary qualification. No such division of christendom into distinct and rival governments as that which now exists could have been possible, without these assumptions or at least one of them. On the one hand, it has been shown in the progress of this work how fundamental these two assumptions are to the papal church, and how inevitably, in the then existing conditions of christendom, that church grew out of them. If on the other hand we examine one of the Christian bodies of the present time, which is perhaps as far removed as any one that can be named from the papal church, we shall find one of these assumptions at least essential to its existence. I refer especially to that body of Christians which largely grew up under the influence of the late Alexander Campbell. In that body, the Lord's Supper is not subjected to any clerical or corporate control. It is left free to be observed by the Christian brotherhood, without the intervention of any priestly function. Neither is the exhibition of baptism a priestly function. The only assumption by which the separate existence of the sect was created and is maintained is, that the church in its corporate capacity rigidly requires that all its members shall be immersed. It dictates the action by which the water shall be applied in the rite. The sect retains its separate existence only by this shadow of the power of the keys. These two examples may be considered as occupying the two extremes, and all other religious bodies occupy some intermediate position, and the assumption of the power in some form is a condition of their continued separate existence.

It is necessary however to remark, that there are some so-called Christian bodies which have a distinctive name and a feeble organization, and yet their sepa-

ration from the rest of christendom depends, not much on the use they make of Christian rites, for they make very little use of them, and hold them in very low esteem, but on their negation of that doctrine of Christ on which for the most part the faith and order of christendom rests. To these the above analysis is not applicable. I am concerned with those who embrace Christianity, and not with those who reject it.

There is no difficulty therefore in pointing out the one cause without the presence of which the existence of the phenomena of sect as we witness them would be impossible. It is the very same departure from the principles of the primitive church which created the church of the Middle Ages. But since the Reformation, the development of this cause has been greatly facilitated and quickened by other causes. The island of Great Britain has been the hot-bed of sect. It has already been remarked, that the Reformation in England was the product of two great social movements not only distinct from but contradictory to each other. One of them was political, originating in the royal will. This party sought entire separation from Rome and the aggrandizement of royal prerogative, and beyond this to reform as little as possible. The other movement was religious and devout, and desired to reform in all things in accordance with the doctrine and law of Christ. Originally this party would have been satisfied with such a reformed national church as that of Luther or Calvin. But the party of the court and the bishops would consent to no such thorough work of reform, and sought to satisfy the nation with a church conforming much more nearly to that from which they had separated. With this the more religious party were never satisfied. The stringent and often harsh and severe measures of the court and the bishops to compel uni-

versal conformity to the national church, not only in the minutest but often the most puerile details of ceremony and clerical vestments, created additional discontent, and drove earnest and devout minds to a more radical and thorough investigation of the nature and powers of the Christian church, and the spiritual rights and privileges of the Lord's people. The further they prosecuted these inquiries, the wider was their dissent from a church which retained many of the despotic principles of the papal hierarchy, and many of the superstitions which had originated in ages of darkness and error, and the more earnest and imperative was their demand for a reformation of the national church more radical and thorough than would have been at first demanded. At length despairing of any relief within the national church, they were driven to the necessity of separating from it, and churches were organized not only distinct from the national church, but adopting that principle of local independency, according to which all the churches of apostolic times were constructed. Against such separate organizations all the power of the court and the national hierarchy was exerted. In the heat of the persecution, some fled to Holland where greater liberty of worship was enjoyed. Many fled across the Atlantic to the inhospitable wilds of New England and made for themselves a home in the New World, where they could enjoy the inestimable privilege of worshipping God according to their own conscientious convictions. Others remained still in England under great hardships and disabilities, and from them sprung the numerous and powerful body of English Independents as it exists at the present time.

According to principles already explained, the Baptist body was soon separated from the Independents, on account of the different method of applying water in

baptism, and also on account of a difference in practice in reference to the baptism of infants. The same times of heated controversy generated another sect in England, which at first view seems to be an exception to the generalizations of this chapter. I refer of course to the Friends or Quakers. This sect can however after all hardly be regarded as exceptional. They separated themselves from all other Christian people by rejecting all external religious ceremonies, baptism and the Lord's Supper included. Other Christian bodies determined by corporate action who should be admitted to the enjoyment of Christian rites, and who excluded from them. By a like exercise of corporate power, the Friends excluded all from these rites, and pronounced the rites themselves unchristian. Not less than other sects they determined by corporate power the relation of all Christian disciples to baptism and the Lord's Supper, and by so doing made themselves a sect separate from all the rest of the Christian world. This sect has been perpetuated in England till the present time; and in the year 1682, a body of men belonging to the society of Friends, under the leadership of William Penn, founded the city of Philadelphia, and the State of Pennsylvania. Members of this sect settled also in Rhode Island at an early day.

Not far from the middle of the eighteenth century, the Wesleys and their associates attempted to revive the faith and fervor of apostolic times in the English national church, and both within and without the church a great spiritual movement was the result. John Wesley the organizer of the reform had no intention whatever of revolutionizing the polity of the national church. Like the reformers of the sixteenth century, he aimed, not at changes in polity, but at the revival of spiritual religion. But in his efforts to promote this end, he

was driven to the use of measures which the authorities of the national church did not approve, and could not be persuaded to sanction. Mr. Wesley was sincerely attached to the established church, and very averse to the idea of separating from it. But all hope was at last abandoned of securing any such enlargement of the toleration of the church, as would comprehend Mr. Wesley's followers, and a necessity which was deeply regretted by the leaders of the movement, compelled them to become and to remain a separate sect in England. Emigration bore this sect to the United States. It has here increased very rapidly, and has for many years occupied a very prominent position among the religious bodies which divide the Christian people of the United States.

Emigration also transplanted the national church itself to American soil, where it exists, like all other religious bodies, as a distinct sect, having no political power or connection with the state, one of the very numerous, sisterhood of American sects. Thus five of the sects which divide the population of England and the United States and indeed of all English-speaking countries, originated either directly from the Reformation itself, or from the efforts of the more radical party, to obtain a reform more thorough than the civil and ecclesiastical authorities which controlled the national church could be persuaded to grant. Had the government of England been as absolute as those of the Continent, and had the state church been as thorough in its reforms as the reformed churches of the Continent were, probably these divisions might not have taken place, or might have been much less extensive and influential. But the seeds of liberty which were early planted in the British constitution, and which its sovereigns, however despotic in character, could never eradicate, ren-

dered it impossible that the cravings of the national heart for more thorough reformation should be repressed by the strong hand of power. The integrity and unrelenting exclusiveness of the English Church has been maintained by making England the hot-bed of sect for the whole English-speaking world.

In Scotland, much the same result has been reached, though by a different process. The principle however has been the same. The state church which was constituted at the Reformation was Presbyterian, closely conforming to that which Calvin established at Geneva. Its fundamental conception was that all church power was originally lodged in the highest church judicatory,¹ and that between this judicatory and the government of the state the most intimate union should exist. At times the church might rather be said to be supreme over the state than the state over the church. In the exercise of this centralized ecclesiastical power, the church sought to secure throughout Scotland the most absolute uniformity, both of doctrine and worship. But the whole body of the Scotch clergy were active members of the judicatories of the church, and eligible to seats in the General Assembly. In the deliberations of these judicatories, differences of opinion were constantly liable to arise, and to excite such a degree of conscientious zeal, that the majority would not tolerate the minority, and the minority would not submit to the majority. The result was that what was one Presbyterian church of Scotland would, by the secession of the minority, become two Presbyterian churches, perfectly alike in constitution, and differing from each other only in respect to the particular matter in controversy; the church of the majority remaining the national

¹ See Hetherington's History of Church of Scotland.

church, and the church of the minority becoming a dissenting sect. This process has been repeated in the history of the church of Scotland, till she numbers six Presbyterian sects, including the national church, which differs from the rest only in being supported by the state.¹

Independency is also an original product of Scotland as well as of England. It originated there at the close of the last century, and resulted from the efforts of two laymen, John Haldane and Robert Aikman, to evangelize the neglected and half-heathenized masses that were then found in Edinburgh. It was no part of their intention to found a sect or a polity. Though having received no ordination, they found themselves moved by the spirit of God to preach the gospel to the poor, and, in the true spirit of primitive Christianity, they baptized converts in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and in the great congregations that thronged to hear the word of God from their lips, they united with the whole multitude of the disciples in "showing forth the Lord's death till he come." In their outset, their churches were simply an affirmation of the liberty wherewith Christ maketh his people free, and a solemn protest against that ecclesiastical sacramentalism, which had been for two centuries filling Scotland with warring sects. How far they have retained the apostolic character of their beginnings to the present time I am not well informed.

From the Reformation to the English Revolution of 1688, the friends of prelacy never entirely relinquished their efforts to subjugate the church of Scotland to Episcopal rule. After the union of its crown with that

¹ Essays on Christian Union, Essay V., by Rev. David King, LL. D. London, 1851.

of England, the sovereigns of England made very persistent efforts to accomplish this object by a despotic exercise of royal prerogative. These efforts subjected Scotland to great civil and religious agitations and convulsions, and bore a very important part in bringing on the great rebellion which cost Charles I. his crown and his life. Under Charles II. the attempt was again renewed with the most despotic cruelty, and was so far successful that, though at the revolution the church of Scotland under its Presbyterian form was permanently recognized as a national church, there still remained in Scotland an offshoot of the English national church which, though divested of any connection with the state, still holds its place as one of the numerous sects among which the people of Scotland are divided. Thus Scotland has been even more prolific than England in sects; and as all its sects have been transplanted by emigration, it has contributed very largely to the very numerous sisterhood of sects found in all English-speaking countries.

It will be seen then that three causes have been essentially concerned in that multiplication of sects which originated in Great Britain, and has been transplanted to all British colonies. The first of these is the persistent claim of the power of the keys in the hands of an ecclesiastical corporation. This comes from the Middle Ages and the corruptions of the early centuries of Christian history. The second of these causes is the growing religious liberty which was the product of the Reformation. The third is the effort of the national churches of England and Scotland to compel uniformity of faith and worship, constantly resisted by a longing desire for more perfect reformation and greater spiritual liberty.

The national reformed churches of the Continent

have also contributed something to the multiplication of sects in modern christendom, though far less than England and Scotland. In the original construction of those churches, the demand of the several nations for a thorough and satisfactory reform of religion was not repressed and restrained by the combined efforts of civil and ecclesiastical power, as it was in England. The people were satisfied, and there was therefore little to awaken the spirit of dissent. On the other hand the governments were absolute, and strong enough easily to repress any tendencies to dissent which might be manifested. For these reasons sects have not been multiplied in the Protestant countries of the Continent. But during the three hundred years and more which have elapsed since the beginning of the Reformation, emigration from various European countries has greatly enlarged the area of European civilization, by extending it over vast regions of the earth, the existence of which was only made known to Europe at the end of the fifteenth century. To this emigration the Protestant countries of Europe have largely contributed, and their emigrant population have carried with them their attachment to the national churches of their fathers. It has not often been in their power to make that church national in the countries to which they have emigrated. But if in those countries they have found religious liberty, they have not generally amalgamated themselves with the existing religious institutions of the country, but have constructed for themselves a church without any connection with the state indeed, but in all other respects after the model of their fatherland. Thus in our country, and in most other countries which have been peopled by comparatively recent emigration from Europe, offshoots will be found from most of the national Protestant churches, occupying places of more

or less prominence among existing sects. Thus most of the national Protestant churches have added at least one to the number of sects which have come to this country in swarms from England and Scotland. The same thing happens in other countries, whose unused resources and ample religious freedom invite immigration from the whole civilized world. Lutheranism in Germany is a national church ; in all countries to which German emigrants go, it is a sect. The national church of Holland is substantially Presbyterian ; but the Dutch who emigrated to this country, instead of uniting with Presbyterians from other countries, organized a separate church after their national pattern, and till very recently it bore the national name. It is now simply the reformed church, which distinguishes it from nothing.

In like manner, although as has been shown the papal church is everywhere the uncompromising enemy of religious liberty, and wherever it rules shuts out Protestantism by the strong hand of power as in Spain, and in Austria and Italy, so long as it bore rule there ; yet she is hindered by no modesty and no conscientious scruple from availing herself of religious liberty wherever it exists, to plant and strengthen herself as much as possible by means of her emigrating population, and thus becomes an important sect in open antagonism with all others, in all countries whose circumstances invite the immigration of laborers.

In order to secure a perfectly distinct view of the matters presented in this chapter, it is necessary that the following things should be particularly noticed, even at the expense of falling into some repetition.

1. The phenomena of sect as they are seen in the nineteenth century are not produced by religious liberty, but by the want of it. They result from the efforts of men to find freedom of expression, action and worship,

when restrained from the enjoyment of such freedom by a despotism exercised over the conscience. England and Scotland have not been made the hot-beds of sect for all christendom by the religious liberty they have granted, half so much as by their unnatural and tyrannical efforts to restrain it. It is perhaps generally supposed that our country is the principal sect-producer of the world, and the reason is supposed to be found in our unlimited religious freedom. These ideas are entirely erroneous. Our country is not half so prolific of sects as Britain, and the sects which it has produced have very largely resulted from the practical working of religious systems and religious ideas which are not at all of American origin, but have been transplanted to our soil from the hot-beds of Great Britain. Presbyterianism did not change its nature by a voyage across the Atlantic, and has shown almost as much power to generate new sects by its internal conflicts in this country as in its native Scotland. The same is true of the American offshoots of other transatlantic churches. Our country is not in any eminent degree a nursery of sects. It is a vast open field upon which all the sects which have originated from the long struggle between religious liberty and spiritual despotism in Europe have been transplanted, and in which they have found room to grow. It is only this process of transplanting that has made ours the most sectarian country in the world. The history of this country affords no evidence that absolute religious liberty tends to the multiplication of sects, but much evidence to the contrary.

2. Protestantism derived the germ from which all its sects have sprung from the papal church itself. It is a sect-producer not because it is Protestant, but because it is not Protestant enough. It still bears along with it the unmistakable lineaments of its papal parent-

age. Sect springs from the very same mistaken interpretation of the nature and powers of the church of Christ by which Hildebrand ruled christendom, and made monarchs tremble on their thrones. The papal church is itself not only a sect, but the harlot mother of all sects, a sect indeed which in the Middle Ages crushed the human soul with such terrible vigor, as to render successful dissent impossible. She embraced within herself all sect. In an earlier age it was not so. The great schism between Eastern and Western churches which remains till this day was in all respects precisely analogous to the rise of religious sects under Protestantism. Rome and Constantinople each sought to exercise despotic power over the consciences of all christendom. Neither had the power to compel the other to submission, and therefore each became a sect which endures to this day, and will endure, till that good time coming when God shall "destroy them by the breath of his mouth and the brightness of his coming." In the same manner the separation of the other churches of the early ages from the rest of the Christian world was in all respects precisely analogous to the phenomena of modern sect. On the one hand there was dissent, on the other lack of power to compel submission.

Dissent is not always restrained by temporal pains and penalties, but often only by ghostly terrors which superstition inspires. Such is the fact in respect to the papal church at the present time, in all countries of religious liberty. She can only retain her power over those who still believe that her hierarchy wields the spiritual powers of the world, and is able to affect the destiny of the human soul by intangible forces and after its departure from the body. It is through such beliefs that the papal hierarchy chiefly exerts its power, and preserves its unity in the nineteenth century.

That by these forces which superstition supplies, she is able at present to hold in her spell a large portion of nominal christendom cannot be denied ; but considering how rapid is the progress of intelligence in the christendom of the present, her hold on the future must certainly be considered precarious.

3. It is a mistake to suppose, that mere differences of religious opinion must necessarily create religious sects. Those persons indeed who entertain contradictory views as to the nature and essence of Christianity can neither worship nor act together. In such a case affirmation cannot harmonize with negation, for what one would build up the other would pull down. But the innumerable minor differences of opinion which prevail in all free communities neither necessitate the formation of rival religious sects, nor tend to create them. If you place a certain class of men in such relations to all the rest of the world, that, according to universally received opinion, the rest of mankind can neither obey God nor worship him acceptably without their intervention, that class of men will dictate opinions to the rest of the world. If you construct a religious society and invest it with the sacredness which attaches to the church of Christ, and in that society you confer such powers on a corporation that God can only be successfully approached by its intervention or permission, that corporation will impose its own creed on the society, in respect to minor as well as to essential matters. In a church so constituted a new sect may be originated about the question what version of the Psalms shall be sung, as easily as about the existence of a personal God or the divinity of Christ. But without the exercise of any such powers in the government of the church, such minor questions have little tendency to create sects.

It is not a necessary condition of the formation of a sect, that there should be any diversity of opinion at all. We have in this country at least one example of a sect of national dimensions, the existence of which does not in the least depend on any differences of opinion. I need only name the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Its separate existence depends entirely on social antipathies and aversions. It is not supposed that people of African and European origin are bound to a different destiny in a future life, but it is thought desirable to build up a good strong partition wall across the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of heaven, to secure for them separate accommodations so long as they are in the body. Qualifications for membership in a church of Christ are in this case not to be sought for in moral and spiritual lineaments, but in the features of the face and the texture of the hair. Sect does not spring from any necessity of human nature, but from constituting the church on principles utterly foreign to the conception of the Founder of the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER II.

APOLOGIES FOR SECT.

IF the conclusions of the last chapter in respect to the origin and causes of the sects of modern christendom are sound, it would seem a hopeless task to apologize for their existence, and much more so to defend them as beneficial. We could hardly expect — wise men would not expect — to find sweet water gushing from so bitter a fountain. Nor is the present sectarian condition of the church of Christ sanctioned and rendered sacred by the approbation of the wise and good of former ages. They never have sanctioned it, but on the contrary have sought by all the means in their power to guard against and avoid it.

And yet on few subjects have wise and good men in recent times labored so industriously and so honestly, as in their efforts to apologize for this condition of the church. The present generation of Christians did not create it. Consistently with those principles of church organization which have come down to us unquestioned from the fathers, we could not help it. It was a logical necessity which we could not avoid. We cannot now avoid it, without boldly and bravely calling those principles in question, and from doing that we shrink. Those principles were not called in question at the Reformation. There was, as has been shown, no apparent necessity for such an investigation. Those logical

results of the organic principles on which the church had stood for ages, which we experience, and find to our sorrow to be inevitable, were not and could not then be foreseen. It was impossible, that those principles should be earnestly called in question, till they had borne their own proper fruit. Then and not till then such an investigation would take place. In our day they have borne and ripened their appropriate fruits, and nowhere in such abundance as in our own country. We are reduced to the necessity of accepting those fruits, and vindicating them as genuine products of the gospel of Christ, or of calling in question the organic principles of which they are the logical results. It is only when such alternatives are presented, that the aversion of men to calling in question long-established social ideas is overcome, and radical investigation takes place. The Protestant Reformation presented such an alternative to the reformers, and bravely they met it. Just such an alternative the phenomena of sect are presenting to the present generation. The numerous apologies which we meet on every hand for the existence of sect, and the innumerable defences of it as a good and very desirable fruit of religious liberty, afford very striking proof, that such an alternative is really presented to us, and such a radical discussion of the subject inevitable. Before we proceed further it is necessary candidly to consider the more important of these apologies and defences.

The first which seems to demand our attention is, the claim often put forward, that the diversity of sects which exists is a providential arrangement for accommodating the great variety of taste, feeling and culture which is found among Christian people. It is often claimed that men are naturally so different from each other, that they cannot easily and comfortably work together

in the same ecclesiastical system. We often hear it asserted that some men are natural-born Episcopalians, having an innate liking for formal liturgies and stately ceremonies and ecclesiastical vestments, just as the water-fowl has for his own natural element; that other men have an innate fitness for the various forms of worship which are found in Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, or Congregational churches; and that it is therefore a very wise providential arrangement, that all these and many other diversities exist. To hear some men talk, you would think diversity of sects is as necessary as diversity of climate is to suit all the different orders of living beings which are found in the vegetable and animal kingdoms.

I never listen to this sort of argument without the impression, that those who resort to it are quite conscious of having a hard case to make out. If diversity of sects really sustains any such relation to human nature, it is marvellous, that the primitive church was not so constructed as to bring into being at once all the variety of sects which human nature renders so desirable. What an easy thing it would have been for the apostles to have built up a Jewish church, cherishing all the rites of the Mosaic law, and right over against it a Gentile church in which all this ceremonialism was discarded! The principle of sect being thus introduced under apostolic sanction, the number of sects might have been multiplied so rapidly that, even before the death of the last of the apostles, this great want of human nature might have been as fully provided for as it is in our times. But it is evident the apostles had never seen this subject in the light of our modern experience. Nothing did they resist with greater earnestness than any tendency to division among the disciples, even in spirit, and still more in

form and external organization. No matter how strong the natural repulsion was between Jews and Gentiles, or how different their tastes, manners and customs, the apostles insisted on bringing them together in the same church, and on accustoming them in that intimate relation to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. This is not wisdom according to the standard of the nineteenth century, but it is apostolic wisdom; perhaps it will yet be discovered even in these modern times, that it is the wisdom of God.

The papal church, notwithstanding the rigor of its spiritual despotism, affords a very striking illustration of the manner in which a world-wide religious body, embracing within its bosom every variety of nationality, thought, taste, culture, may yet furnish ample scope for the exercise of every human talent and the gratification of every taste, without in the least impairing its unity or endangering its tranquillity. She has great enterprises for the bold, the strong, the restless; and quiet walks and tranquil lives for the thoughtful and contemplative. She has full employment for the imagination in poetry and art, and for the admirers of a splendid ceremonial and a venerable liturgy, in her cathedral worship. How much more would this be true, if the whole multitude of disciples in all lands and in every variety of taste and culture were firmly bound together according to the conception of the Founder, only by moral and spiritual ties, in the full enjoyment of the freedom wherewith Christ maketh his people free! The world-wide unity of the papal church cannot, as experience abundantly demonstrates, be maintained, without imposing the most vigorous restraints on the exercise of the intellect, in all things pertaining to God. But in the Holy Catholic Church, every human faculty will be quickened, and there will be abundant scope for the

exercise of every talent, and the gratification of every taste consistent with virtue. An all-pervading vital force will quicken the entire body of the faithful into vigorous and healthful activity, and earnest men will not fail to devise and employ all desirable modes of manifesting the spirit of devotion. Living activity will be everywhere with all its variety, and dead uniformity nowhere. Into such a church of God, to introduce diversity of sects would only be to mar and to degrade.

Diversities of sect are not necessary or fitted to accommodate any natural diversities of character; but they do tend to create and perpetuate unnatural peculiarities of character in the different classes of society, which are inconsistent with the health and soundness of the body politic. Every one of the religious sects which exists at the present time tends to separate and isolate its members from the rest of the community, and to produce a narrowness of thought and affection, which is quite inconsistent with the growth of a perfected civilization. In many cases you may know what sect a man is of almost as soon as he begins to speak. Too many of us always carry with us the unmistakable badge of the isolation in which we live. Each sect tends to be a community within itself, building up and maintaining a little civilization of its own, and repelling many beneficent influences which it might derive from truly cosmopolitan relations with the rest of mankind. In our own country, it is deplorable to notice how much the breadth and completeness of our national character are impaired by this littleness which sect produces. It is as though we were not the people of one great continental nation, but separate tribes cut off from communication with each other by impassable natural barriers. Many persons will not accept this view of the case as true, because to them the standard of their own sect is

accepted as the standard of perfection. But thoughtful, candid men will sorrowfully recognize this picture as true to life. It is easy to find American Methodists or American Presbyterians or American Episcopalians, but hard to find American Christians.

In England the case is if possible still worse. There each sect tends to find the sphere of its activity in some one of the numerous ranks into which English society is permanently divided, and thus to separate that rank from the rest of the community by religious as well as by social boundaries. You might almost say that each rank has its church, as each caste in India has its own religious rites. To this however there is one sad exception. In the established church, the highest and the lowest ranks meet together, but without the presence of those intermediate social grades which are the proper natural links of connection between them. Thus, in the case of the two extremes of society, their being brought together in the same worshipping assemblies under the most unnatural conditions tends to promote that domination of the great, and that cringing servility of the lowly, the sight of which so often makes us sad in England.

I must therefore conclude that this apology for sect is quite fallacious ; that the reason which sustains it is preposterous, putting cause for effect and effect for cause ; not affording necessary accomodation for natural diversities, but creating those which are unnatural and morbid, and inconsistent with the completeness and unity of Christian civilization.

Another apology for sect which is often asserted with great complacency and assurance is, that the existence of such diversities quickens thought, encourages discussion, and promotes progress in religious knowledge. It is confidently affirmed, that without it religious society

would become dead and stagnant ; and the argument is generally illustrated by the supposed analogy of a pool of water agitated by no breezes, and stirred by no currents. The argument and the figure by which it is illustrated are alike fanciful and groundless. Pure water will not stagnate, though motionless ; neither does pure society require the agitation of partisan controversy, to preserve its intellectual vigor and activity. Those who resort to this mode of arguing, as an apology for the existing diversities of sect, always fall into bewildering confusion of thought. They first bewilder themselves, then their followers. They confound together two things which have already been shown to be so distinct, that the existence of one of them does not at all imply the existence of the other. Diversity of religious opinion does not at all imply diversity of sect. Give us that intellectual liberty in the church, which is so much of the essence of Christianity that it cannot produce its appropriate results without it, and the widest diversity of opinions about everything except the truth of Christianity itself will exist, without any tendency to divide the Christian body into as many sects as there are differing shades of religious opinion. To assume that this is not true, is to assume that there can be absolutely no intellectual liberty in a Christian church. It has all along been not only admitted, but affirmed, that membership in the church of Christ implies faith in those great facts on which Jesus Christ and the apostles founded Christianity and the Christian church. It has been shown in the progress of this work that there is no difficulty at all in knowing what those matters of fact are ; and it is absurd for any one who rejects them to claim or desire to be recognized as a Christian. We do not judge them, we do not abridge their intellectual liberty, or even their religious liberty.

The universe is large enough both for them and for us. We only affirm that one cannot be a Christian disciple and yet deny the fundamental facts of Christianity. He must go his own way, make his own election, and run the risk of attempting to work out the problem of destiny without Christianity. But within those limits, the freedom of Christ is wide enough to accommodate all the differences of opinion which can result from the diversities of men's innocent tastes, and the limitations of the human intellect.

The existence of such differences of opinion not only does not imply diversity of sects, but it operates on religious society far more healthfully and beneficently without sectarian divisions than with them. Religious controversies respecting matters in regard to which the disputants are already organized into rival sects, and each is contending, not only for his party, but for his sacred Christian church, cannot be healthful, or have much tendency to promote Christian truth. It is scarcely possible that such disputants should be under the simple influence of the love of truth. They are not only contending for victory, but for the defence of their holy city, of the sacred ark of God. Each is surrounded by a host of followers whose only solicitude is that their party, their church may be successfully defended. How little chance that truth can gain anything from such a conflict! Lookers-on are painfully impressed by the spectacle. It seems to them only a battle-field, an outbreak of partisanship, a struggle for the pre-eminence. Both parties seem to have lost the peaceful and loving spirit of the Master, and to be uselessly disturbing the peace of the community. In the result each party adheres to his belief with feelings embittered and alienated toward each other, and Christianity itself suffers a degradation in the estimation of the commu-

nity. There is no thoughtful man among us who will not recognize this picture as true to life. If experience teaches us anything in this matter, it is that diversity of sects does not tend to healthful and useful religious discussion. Everybody knows this.

It is for this reason that, in those portions of christendom where sects are most multiplied, there is a strong tendency to discountenance all public discussion of the matters about which different sects are at variance with each other. It is so apt to result in exciting a contentious and unchristian spirit, that the conclusion is at last reached, that all such discussion is essentially uncharitable and evil, and ought to be frowned upon by all good men. For the most part it is so frowned upon. The result is that a truce is tacitly entered into between the different religious sects, to abstain from all public discussion of the subject matter which divides them. This truce proceeds upon the assumption, that our present sectarian divisions are an unavoidable result of that religious liberty to which we all mean to adhere, and must therefore be perpetual. The boundaries of doctrine and polity which separate the different sects from each other are already distinctly drawn, and it is presumed they are to be permanent. The attempt to shake or overthrow any of these established landmarks is thought to be a gratuitous disturbance of the tranquillity of the community, and an uncharitable violation of the tacit treaty of peace which exists between these high powers, that have parcelled out among themselves and assume to govern all christendom.

It must not be supposed however that the existence of such a truce implies any real cessation of the conflict between them. He who thinks so takes a very superficial view of the subject. Each sect assumes the necessity, not only of perpetuating its existence, but of

extending its influence. Public controversy is laid aside as an impracticable weapon, but the work of proselytism goes on with unresting activity in innumerable forms which are less obtrusive, and less open to scandal than public controversy, but which perhaps are not less efficient or less indicative of the perpetual unrest with which the community is afflicted. It is by no means my purpose to draw aside the thin veil that covers this ceaseless activity of the spirit of sectarian proselytism from the public gaze ; but its existence is as certain as it is sad. By such means the multiplication of sects among us, so far from tending to intellectual activity and healthy freedom of discussion, is withdrawing all the matters about which sects are divided from any discussion whatsoever, and dooming the public mind to a very unhealthy stagnation in respect to them. It is equivalent to assuming that, when any opinion has become the settled boundary line between religious sects, it never can be subjected any more to the application of those unerring tests by which the human mind discriminates truth from falsehood ; that along that boundary line there must perpetually exist a dim twilight of the soul, under which some men will confidently affirm, and others will as confidently deny, without the possibility of determining who is right and who is wrong.

The influence of this tacit truce in discountenancing the freedom of discussion is much more extensive than those who originated it intended. They meant it to apply only to the matters which divide those sects which are after all recognized as belonging to the great household of faith, but its influence can by no means be confined within those limits. If it is agreed, that the subjects which divide such sects are exempted from all public controversy, in the interest of Christian charity,

the world will see no reason why the exemption should not extend much more widely. The world will regard it as just as uncharitable for us to assail the doctrines of a sect that differs from us most fundamentally, as those of one that differs from us only on matters not deemed fundamental to Christian faith and character. It has long been true in this country, that no Protestant can freely expose the errors and superstitions of the papal church, especially from the pulpit, without incurring the charge of intolerance, bigotry and uncharitableness. Religious controversy itself has been placed under the ban, as in its own nature uncharitable. When once any religious opinion has organized itself into a sect, it is thought to have acquired a sacredness, which, in the name of Christian charity, and in the interest of the tranquillity of the community, defends it from any open assault. We have come into the condition in which Rome was when she had extended her conquests from the British Isles to the Euphrates, and had transferred to Rome the divinities of all the countries she had conquered. People of every nationality might worship their own divinities, but must respectfully tolerate the worship of every other. In this way only could religious conflict be avoided. The chief reason why Christianity was persecuted was, that from its very nature it could accept of no such truce. It is either a universal religion or no religion at all. It is, like all other systems which claim to be the truth, in its own nature exclusive.

There can be no greater mistake than to imagine, that the multiplicity of sects tends to healthful intellectual excitement, and such progress in freedom of discussion as insures the discovery of truth. Its tendency is in the very opposite direction, and the strength of that tendency is quite heart-sickening. If these

pages ever come to the public eye, the reception they will meet in many quarters will amply illustrate the truth of what I am saying. Many persons will turn from their perusal with a feeling of strong disgust and disapprobation at the freedom with which I have expressed myself on all the religious questions which lie in my path, however hedged around by these sanctities which are supposed to protect the peculiar doctrines of sects long held sacred from being freely handled in the open arena of religious discussion. I have undertaken the work only from a profound conviction, that the church is wandering in the wilderness, and can only find her way out into those regions of peace and liberty, where the church of the future shall find rest, by the utmost freedom of utterance in reference to all the questions which relate to the constitution of the church as its divine Founder conceived of it. The whole truth respecting this matter must be uttered, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.

Another apology for the existing multiplication of sects is perhaps more frequently insisted on than either of those thus far examined. It is claimed that the rivalries of sect stimulate people to a much greater degree of religious activity than would exist without them. It is said that if, in a community in which all Christian people are embraced in the same religious organization, a division takes place, by which the same community becomes two sects, two churches instead of one, both churches are likely to be better supported than the one was before ; and that thus obviously the amount of religious activity in the whole community will have been greatly increased. Nothing can be more deceptive than this conclusion from the premises. There may indeed be cases in which the existing church did not adequately provide for supplying the social

religious wants of the community. There may have been a necessity that church sittings should have been multiplied, that church accommodations should be brought more within the reach of portions of the population, and that therefore two church edifices could accommodate the people much better than one, or the congregation may have become so large that one house cannot conveniently contain it. In such cases as these, and probably in others which might be supposed, a Christian community may with great advantage constitute two local churches where before there was but one, by mutual agreement for the benefit of the common cause; and when such an arrangement has been entered into, it may often prove true that the larger religious enterprise that has been undertaken may greatly stimulate religious activity, so that two churches will be better sustained than one was before. It is because men have a more adequate sense of the religious wants of the community, and therefore make greater efforts to supply them.

There is room however for very grave doubt whether like beneficent results could have been produced in that community by drawing through it the boundary line of two distinct sects. The influence of such a division certainly differs very widely from that of the fraternal division already supposed. The aims of the Christian religion are always moral and spiritual, not material and external. It seeks not the doing of certain external acts from whatever motive, but the formation of such principles and purposes as will do all right things from the impulse of love to God and man. The division of the community supposed will indeed increase the number of church sittings, and make two congregations where there was but one before, and furnish two places of public worship instead of one, and greatly

increase the religious activity of the community in order to accomplish these things. In these respects the result is the same in the two cases. But how different the motives by which men are stimulated to the doing of these things! He who has ever seen the process of drawing a line of sect through a community, and making two where there was but one before, knows the difference between these two cases, and never can forget it. And there are portions of our country, where one cannot have lived long, without witnessing this process, and having had such experience from it, as will lead him to pray that he may never witness it again. He will know ever afterwards, that drawing a line of sect through a community before united, is not the same as a fraternal agreement to organize two Christian churches, because it is seen that such a step is necessary to the adequate supply of the religious wants of the community. Both may quicken activity, but in one case it is the activity of sect, in the other it is the activity of love to Christ and the brethren. In one of these cases, one is likely to encounter a chilling atmosphere of rivalry, ambition and bitterness, in the other an atmosphere of warm and genial and loving zeal for Christ and the souls of men. It is a sad thing to substitute the former of these for the latter. Such a substitution is made with all its sorrowful consequences, whenever the number of congregations in a given community is multiplied by the antagonisms of sect, rather than by fraternal consultation for the common well-being.

This will be true when men are stimulated by sectarian rivalries to do the very same things to the doing of which they ought to have been instigated by Christian love. But he is deplorably deceived who thinks, that the dividing up of a religious community by drawing sectarian lines, will incite men to do the same

things and only the same things which they ought to do from love to Christ. In every case in which the experiment is made, the ambition of sectarian aggrandizement will assert itself, and have great influence in practice ; and he who knows anything about it by experience, knows that it is a very unscrupulous spirit, — just as unscrupulous as any other selfish ambition. Its nature is to inquire, not what the religious welfare of the community requires, but what the aggrandizement of my sect requires, and to act accordingly. An individual or a community that acts under the influence of that motive seems to be very zealous for God ; but it is a very mistaken and misguided zeal, which often stimulates to do many things which the religious welfare of the community does not require, and many things which ought not to be done at all. Its tendency is to surround a church with costly attractions, which do not promote its real usefulness, and thus to bring upon a Christian people heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, drive many from the church who are unable to bear their share in its expenses, and to employ innumerable social influences in the interest of sect, which ought to be employed only in a spirit of universal fraternity and good-will to men. These are general statements, but all who have much experience of sect will easily illustrate them to their own minds by innumerable examples.

Sect may divide a community into two congregations where two congregations ought to exist, and thus do very badly what in due time would have been very happily and usefully done in the spirit of Christ, without its intervention. Even in that case, the mischief which it does and perpetuates is great and lasting. But it is far more likely to make two congregations of one, where such a division can be productive of nothing but evil, where it not only, as in the case before sup-

posed, plants the seeds of mutual alienation and rivalry for the long future, but produces weakness where there ought to be strength, and division of resources where there ought to be concentration, and makes upon the mind of all thoughtful men the impression that, if these people really did love Christ better than sect, they would not persist in maintaining two churches where, for all the purposes of religious efficiency, one would be a great deal better. Over vast districts of our country, cases of this description are multiplied, till in one who considers them rightly they produce a sickness of heart which words cannot describe.

It is vain to tell us, that the multiplication of sects stimulates to greater religious activity, when we know that villages and towns in our own country can be counted by hundreds, in which from four to six Protestant sects are maintaining a sickly and feeble existence, scarcely able, by the utmost possible effort and self-denial, to support themselves from year to year without any efficiency or aggressive power, where, but for our multiplication of sects, one church of Christ would be sustained and exert its mighty influence over the whole community. In this exceedingly numerous class of cases, the result is, that social religious activity is rendered useless, and any real efficiency of the church impossible. In larger towns, by very extraordinary effort, churches of the various names are sustained by pecuniary sacrifices which are unnecessary and exhausting. It would not be difficult to find examples of towns containing from ten to fifteen thousand inhabitants, in which the social worship of God costs not less than six or seven dollars to each inhabitant, old and young ; and that although scarcely more than one half the people are regular attendants of any church, or contribute anything to the support of public worship. In such com-

munities, it is apt to be thought, that the support of Christian institutions is very expensive. It is not Christianity, but sect, that is expensive. This is the way in which sect stimulates to greater religious activity.

If we look in another quarter, we shall be called to contemplate facts still more saddening and alarming. In smaller villages and in the open country, the case is infinitely worse. Undoubtedly the first effect of sect applied to any community is to stimulate to a certain kind of activity, which however at the very best is not very religious. If you go on multiplying sects, you will for a time increase that activity by increasing the burdens which Christian people are compelled to bear. But if this process is carried on in a community of limited and scattered population and small resources, a point is soon reached, at which all the wealth of the community is only adequate to the expense of sustaining one Christian congregation, and the effect of dividing that community into several sects will be, that no one sect will be strong enough, by the utmost activity and liberality, to sustain the public worship of God with any regularity and efficiency. That which is seen to be impossible will not be attempted. The house of God will lie waste. In this manner large districts and multitudinous populations of our country are, by the influence of sect, utterly destitute of any adequate and satisfactory provision for the instruction and spiritual edification of the people. Almost all religious activity is given up, because it is seen to be useless and hopeless. This is sect in the full development of its influence.

I am not unaware that these pages may fall into the hands of persons who honestly think, that one of the great religious bodies of our country, the Methodist Episcopal Church, has provided the means of remedy-

ing the evils I allude to. In another chapter I purpose to examine that remedy, and to show its utter inadequacy, or rather to show that, instead of being a remedy, it intensifies the evil.

I have now completed the examination of the apologies which are usually made for the multiplication of sects. I trust it has been made to appear, that they can only seem to be successful vindications of it when viewed in the most hasty and superficial manner, and that when examined analytically and thoroughly, and traced to their more remote and permanent consequences, it will be found that diversities of sect are only mischievous, in the very respects in which it is claimed by their apologists that their influence is beneficial. It is easy to show that the good which is claimed to result from them is only apparent, and that the evils are great and permanent. The fathers of the Reformation were not mistaken in respect to the evils which they dreaded from opening the flood-gates of sect, though they were mistaken in trying to close those flood-gates by restraining the Lord's people in respect to the exercise of religious liberty. No man would ever think of apologizing for the present factious condition of Christianity in the world, unless he had first been made to believe that it is an inevitable result of religious liberty, and that it cannot be avoided in the future, except by remanding the human mind to the prison-house of spiritual despotism. It is not wonderful that men who sincerely love Christianity and religious liberty, and confidently believe that they cannot coexist in the world without producing all the phenomena of sect as we see them, should wish to apologize for sect, and find some good in it if possible. The reader knows by this time that I feel no such necessity of defending it.

CHAPTER III.

SECT ANTICHRISTIAN.

It is commonly assumed, that the only objection which can be urged against the sectarian condition of christendom is to be found in the evil consequences produced, in the weakness, alienation, and strife occasioned by it, and that if any one of our sects could by itself occupy the whole field, and thus the division of the Christian host be avoided, all would be well. Perhaps we should all be taken by surprise by being credibly informed, what portion of the Christian community confidently entertain the opinion, that nothing else so good could happen to the Christian world, as that all other sects except their own should be abandoned, and their own become universal. It is worth our while perhaps to inquire whether this is really so. May we not safely conclude, that if there is one of the Christian bodies which now divide the religious world, in respect to which that assumption would be true, that one body will be sure to make its profiting to appear, and at no distant day to become universal? Is it not in a high degree probable, that the only reason why no one of the religious bodies of the time seems to have any prospect of attaining to such a destiny is to be found in the fact, that all are more or less vitiated by a common antichristian principle? If this should prove to be true, it would certainly be a matter of very serious concernment to the whole Christian world.

It has already been shown,¹ that the principle that every individual owes direct allegiance to God without the possibility of any rightful human intervention, is fundamental to the religion of the Bible from the beginning till now. Religious liberty is the inalienable birthright of every being made in the image of God. Never was this principle so abundantly and strikingly affirmed, as in the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of Christianity in the world. Jesus asserted his claim as the Messiah of God through no earthly or human authority, but directly to the individual intellect and conscience. It is utterly incredible that, having made his own appeal to the individual conscience as he did, he should ever have established any authority or institution in his kingdom, which should impair or interfere with such an appeal in any future age.

It is equally certain that the power of the keys, as understood for so many ages, and made the fundamental principle of all church government, does constitute a human authority to stand between the individual conscience and God. It does require of the individual disciple the performance of certain acts of worship which he cannot perform without the intervention of a human authority. The men intrusted with that authority are restrained by no accurate definition and limitation of their powers, to forbid their imposing conditions under which alone men may be admitted to the performance of those acts of worship, which conditions are incompatible with the rights of individual conscience. That power of the keys has been so used as to interfere in this manner with direct individual allegiance to God, in every age since that of the apostles, and in every sect of christendom that has asserted and exercised it.

¹ Chap. II., Part I.

It has never failed to be an instrument of spiritual despotism. It is such in its own nature. In what sect of Christian history has not the assumed right to admit men to the Lord's Supper and exclude them from it, been employed as the means of enforcing acquiescence in statements of doctrine, which no man in his senses regards as essential, either to Christian faith or morals, and submission to practices and customs which have no sanction in the law of Christ? It is an instrument always furbished and ready for use. If the pope thinks freemasonry an evil institution, he threatens all good Catholics connected with it with excommunication, unless they renounce it. The same weapon is equally ready for use in the hands of a Congregational church, a Presbyterian judicatory, a Methodist conference, or an Anglican convocation. Let it not be supposed, from my using this illustration, that I have any desire to protect freemasonry from censure. But an assumption of church power can as easily be employed against a good institution as against a bad one, against righteousness as against iniquity. The assumption on the part of the church or clergy of the right to dictate conditions of their own devising, on compliance with which alone individual disciples may be permitted to come near to Christ in baptism and the Lord's Supper, is a violation of the rights of individual conscience. This is sect. It is the seed of all sect, and it is essentially antichristian.

When therefore the church in the ages that followed that of the apostles placed the keeping of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the hands of a clerical and priestly corporation, it did more than introduce a principle which must work mischief in the future. It admitted an antichristian element which must produce present disastrous effects whenever acted upon. It

must greatly change the relation of the individual member to the church and its government, and to the rites of Christian worship. The custom still prevails in some churches, that before each observance of the Lord's Supper each communicant must apply to the officers of the church for a token, without the presentation of which he will be denied a seat at the table. If the church officers think they have any reason for objecting to anything in his life, they will withhold the token, and deprive him of participation. How different the spirit of such an observance of the Lord's Supper from that of the original institution, and from the observance of it in the apostolic churches! The element of freedom and spontaneity is gone. The private communicant is under bondage, the church officer exercises an authority which cannot but be dangerous. No one deeply imbued with the spirit of apostolic times can fail to feel, that it has no sanction there, and yet the custom of giving tokens and requiring their presentation at the table is only a consistent acting out of the power of the keys, wherever it is assumed and exercised. It is the end of spiritual liberty in the church of God.

No right-minded Protestant fails to regard the confessional, as it is employed in the papal church, with intense moral disapprobation. Yet no man can point out any difference in principle between the confessional and the use of tokens as it probably still exists, certainly as it has existed within my personal recollection in many Presbyterian churches. It is true indeed, that the view entertained in the papal church of the consequences of exclusion from the Lord's Supper is not the same as that which is maintained in the Presbyterian church. For this reason we are apt to be much more shocked at the practices of the confessional than by the use which a Presbyterian church session makes

of the power of the keys, in the case of which I am speaking. But both employ the same instrument of church power. Both exercise a restraint on the liberties of conscience by means of an asserted guardianship of this Christian rite. If one can be defended on scriptural principles, so can the other. The very same argument which will vindicate the one is equally good to vindicate the other. If the church really has the power of the keys, the more thoroughly and stringently she uses it, the more faithful she is to her divine Master. On the other hand, the use of tokens in the Presbyterian church is only a systematic and stringent exercise of a power which every Presbyterian church session claims and professes to exercise. If that claim of power really rests on scriptural authority, no valid objection can be made to the use of the token. No reason can be given why any Congregational church claiming the same ecclesiastical power should not use tokens or even the confessional. The same principle pervades the whole, applied more or less stringently. That principle is the nucleus of all sect.

The assertion and exercise of such a power as this always tends, in proportion to the degree in which it is exercised, to cultivate a selfish and despotic spirit, and to fill the soul with the lust of dominion. It has been the evil genius of the Christian church from the early ages to the present time. The tendency of multiplied sects to destroy the harmony of the Christian brotherhood does not depend alone on their multiplicity, but much more on the virulence of this element, with which for the most part they are infected. "Come see my zeal for the Lord!" cries the ardent sectarian. But what he takes to be zeal for the Lord is more frequently the intensely excited lust of power, generated in his heart by that very vicious element which has just been pointed

out. The aspects of religious society around us afford illustrations of the truth of this as sad as they are numerous. In order to make the point perfectly plain, it is necessary to consider some of them more particularly.

A religious community, otherwise united and harmonious, becomes divided in opinion in respect to the mode in which it is most proper that water should be applied in the rite of baptism. Some think that the rite essentially consists in the application of water as an emblem of religious purification, and that therefore it is immaterial in what manner the water is applied. They can certainly allege cases, in some of which the application seems to have been made in one way, and in some in another. Others adhere closely to what seems to have been the primary meaning of the word "baptize" in the Greek language, and therefore maintain, that the rite is essentially immersion, and that no other application of water can be baptism. In an ordinary and healthful condition of religious society, such a diversity of opinion could produce no serious consequences. The solution which Christian freedom would dictate is perfectly easy and natural. Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind, and use that method which he thinks to be right. It is as important as any one thinks it, that each individual should implicitly and exactly obey the Master as he understands him, but not at all important, that every brother in the church should understand him alike and make use of the same method. If it should occur to any one, that the pastor of the church might be hindered by conscientious scruples from exhibiting the rite of baptism in any other than his own mode, the answer is easy. We have only to divest our minds of the unscriptural idea, that the rite of baptism can only be performed by persons possessing clerical powers derived from the laying on of hands.

How then does it happen, that such a division of opinion arising in a Christian community does almost invariably divide it into two sects, whatever disastrous consequences may come from such a division? To this question but one answer can be returned. It is assumed that the Master has made the church in its organic and corporate capacity the guardian and dispenser of the Lord's Supper, and required it so to guard the sanctity of that rite, as to admit to it only those who believe all Christian doctrine, and obey all Christian precepts: and has imposed on the church itself the duty of judging for every individual disciple what are Christian doctrines and Christian precepts. Let this assumption be accepted in the community in question as undoubtedly sound and true, and the division will be inevitable, no matter what evil consequences may be foreseen as likely to come of it. If the existing church enforces one of these methods of performing the rite of baptism to the exclusion of the other, or refuses to enforce that method which one party regards as indispensable to the rite, a new church will certainly be formed, for the purpose of employing the Lord's Supper as a means of enforcing the views of the dissatisfied party, and it will be done in a spirit of entire recklessness of consequences. Men will assume that the Master requires it, and must be obeyed whatever consequences may follow.

What it is necessary here particularly to observe is, not that the principle assumed will necessarily produce division, but that it is itself essentially antichristian, and at variance with that religious liberty which is as fundamental to Christianity as the Messiahship of Jesus; for the Messiahship of Jesus could never have been manifested to the world without it. The cause of this division is the assumption that the church in its corporate capacity is authorized and required to exer-

cise lordship over the individual conscience, and by the power of the keys exclude from the Supper of the Lord all who do not accept its interpretations of Christian doctrine and duty. This is the very despotic assumption by which Hildebrand brought the Emperor of Germany to his feet, clothed in sackcloth. It is the virulent, unscrupulous, despotic, antichristian element which characterizes sect wherever found. It matters comparatively little whether it produces a multiplication of sects, or succeeds in suppressing all dissent. The principle itself is evil, only evil and that continually.

It may be said that I have selected an extreme case, that few sects adopt the principle of exclusive communion as many immersionists do, and that the argument will not hold when the sects adopt mutual intercommunion. The answer is, that I am unable to perceive that mutual intercommunion affects in any way the argument. Open communion as it is called is certainly a step in the right direction. It is a concession of the spirit of sect to the demands of Christian fraternity. But it is only a partial concession, not the relinquishment of the principle itself. It still remains true, that each sect depends for its separate existence on the assumption, that no disciple can gain admission to the Lord's Supper otherwise than through a gate of which the church in her corporate capacity has the key. Each sect claims that it has that key of Peter, and is bound to open and shut only as men comply, or refuse to comply with her interpretations of all Christian doctrine and duty. This is the theoretic basis still on which each sect rests. But theory and practice can seldom be entirely coincident. Considering the rough and impracticable materials with which in this world we have to deal, something of theory must be conceded in practice. It is so in this case.

Few men can be so blinded by their sectarian zeal as not to perceive, that as good Christians can be found in other sects as in their own, and that the Lord's Supper was intended by the Master and Saviour of us all to be a common badge of all his disciples, by the use of which they should manifest to all the world their common relation to him, and their social oneness with each other. Exclusive communion within a sect, which is acknowledged to be only a very small portion of the whole multitude of the disciples, becomes horribly discordant with a sense of Christian fitness and fraternity. What shall be done? The foundations of our sect we cannot abandon, neither will other sects abandon theirs. But we will concede something to the necessities of the case. We cannot deny that the people who compose other sects are disciples as well as we. Something is due to the comity of sects. To such comity therefore we must make some concession. We do not give up our own principles. We will not surrender the keys. We will initiate to the Lord's Supper none who do not square to all our standards. But we will invite to "occasional communion" with us any who have been initiated according to the standards of other bodies, regarded by us as Christian. By making this concession, we relinquish nothing of the stringency of our government over our own members. In relation to them, we hold the keys as firmly as ever. We relinquish nothing of the distinctness of our church from all others, and just as before continue to wield Peter's keys to enforce our ideas of doctrine and duty. Open communion is indeed inconsistent with the fundamental principle of sect; but it is only a partial concession to the demands of Christian comity, while the original root from which sect grows remains as vigorous as ever.

Many of us are greatly shocked at exclusive communion; I am one of the number. It jars harshly upon that estimate which devout minds spontaneously form of the normal relations of the disciples of Christ to each other. They all sustain a common relation to him and to one another, and why should they not unite most lovingly and joyfully in commemorating his death for our sins? Why should one company of disciples exclude another from participating in this celebration? But after all, does not the shock come in at the wrong place? If the Master has appointed that his church shall, in its corporate capacity, use the privilege of celebrating the Supper as a means of compelling all individual disciples to conform to her views of truth and righteousness, on pain of being excluded, then why should she not perform that duty with uncompromising fidelity? Why should she admit to the Supper one whom she regards as refusing to submit to the rite of baptism according to the Lord's requirement? It may be painful to exclude him, but if the church is really charged with the duty of so using the power of the keys as to enforce in this manner all righteousness, why should she not perform it? Why should she compromise her duty as an act of comity to those who disobey the Lord? Exclusive communion is only the consistent use of the power of the keys.

That which is really shocking is the assumption that the church under any organization whatever is charged with the duty or invested with the authority to use the Lord's Supper as an instrument of discipline. This is precisely the thing which must be shown from the clear testimony of Scripture in order to indicate the foundation on which the whole sect system rests, from the ante-Nicene age of the church to the present time. If that can be made out from Scripture, then let not the

church shrink from the performance of her duty. Let no modern ideas of comity deter her from the use of the keys in vindication of all righteousness. But this is the point which can never be made out. There is not a hint in the New Testament of the church being charged with such a responsibility, or invested with such an authority. It is in direct contradiction of that religious liberty, that liberty of conscience which lies at the very foundation of Christianity.

What does any church Protestant or Catholic mean, when it makes the solemn decision, that such a person is excluded from the communion, till he does this or does that? Can it mean anything else than to assert the claim that, at least in respect to its own members, it holds the key to the Lord's Supper, and can exclude any individual member from it at its discretion? Let us take an example. The judicatories of the Presbyterian Church adopt the regulation that dancing is to be regarded and treated as a sin, and subjected to discipline accordingly. Let me not be misunderstood. I am not an advocate of dancing as it is practised among the fashionable amusements of the time. That is not the question. The question which I raise is, whether the Presbyterian Church in the United States has a warrant to employ the Lord's Supper as an instrument of prohibiting that amusement. For myself I am utterly shocked at the assumption. Vast multitudes of enlightened men are shocked at it. This is the reason why the discipline of the church can never be enforced against it. But the reason is a great deal more fundamental than at first view it seems to be. According to the theory of church discipline which prevails throughout christendom, the church in its corporate capacity has an unlimited right to judge of all points of Christian belief and Christian practice, and

may use its control over the Lord's Supper in enforcing its judgments upon individual conscience at its discretion. For if Jesus Christ conferred this power at all, it is certain he never limited it by any exact definitions. It is unlimited in practice. If any one says it should be limited, I answer, then Jesus Christ should have limited it, if he conferred it at all. This he has certainly not done.

The power is capable of being used not only to enforce doctrines and duties, but to procure submission to all the laws and regulations which any body of men calling themselves a church of Christ may choose to enact and establish, and especially in enforcing the authority of the church itself. No matter how the church is constituted, its language to the individual is, submit or be excommunicated; and excommunicated means of course deprivation of the Lord's Supper. Our question is a very simple one, Did Jesus Christ ever grant such a power to any church under any organization? Can it be proved from the New Testament? If it can, I submit, and shall never be shocked at exclusive communion. But I am shocked at the presumption which has pervaded christendom for so many centuries, that he ever committed to his church such power over individual conscience. This is where the shock should come in.

The worst feature in the case is the indefiniteness of the power conferred on the church, if any is conferred. If the grant of power had been made perfectly explicit, and the constitution of the body on which it was conferred had been accurately defined, and if the rules of judgment according to which the power was to be exerted had been made as exact and definite as the imperfections of human language permit, even then the corporate authority of the church over individual con-

science would have imposed a restraint on individual liberty quite inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity. But all these conditions of definiteness are entirely wanting. One body of men may constitute the church in one way, and another in another, and each may equally claim the power of the keys. The rules according to which the power is to be exercised are equally indefinite. Hildebrand may employ it to humble kings and emperors at his feet, and a modern Baptist church to enforce immersion. One church may employ it against freemasonry, another against the use of tobacco, another against dancing, another still to prescribe the version of the Psalms of David which shall be used in social worship. One church may employ it to enforce the color and texture and form of clerical vestments, and the very words in which Christian congregations shall approach to God in worship, and another to discountenance "the worldly luxury of long hair." That our Lord ever conferred such a power on the church is utterly incredible, and if there were any hint in the New Testament that he did confer it, that fact would immensely increase our difficulty in defending the New Testament, as worthy of the source from which it claims to have come.

It is quite groundless, and indeed puerile, to claim for any one of the existing religious bodies, that it is exempt from this indefiniteness. Let any one claiming this show the explicit grant of power and the exact definition of the jurisdiction. The Anglican, the Papal, the Presbyterian, and the Congregational must alike fail in the attempt. If the power of the keys was granted to any of these, it is left as indefinite as the circle of human relations and duties, and the claim of any church to the possession of that power is a claim of unlimited right to exercise authority over the individ

ual conscience. This is the vicious element which inheres in the whole sect system. It is the corrupting influence of asserting and exercising such a power over the consciences of men, that constitutes the ambitious and unscrupulous character of sect, wherever it is found. Bodies of men accustomed to claim and exercise such powers will always be ambitious of their own aggrandizement, and reckless of the consequences of the measures deemed necessary to secure that aggrandizement. The interests of sect will be predominant, and have more influence than any genuine regard for the moral and spiritual welfare of the community. It is nothing at all strange, that sect so constituted should, with unscrupulous energy, drive the wedge of division through any community however small, and unable to sustain several different religious organizations; nor that these organizations should be tenaciously adhered to for generations, at the expense of whatever disaster to the Christian cause.

As good men become acquainted with the sad conditions of religious society in many of our new settlements, they are filled with wonder, why things should be as they find they are. Why will men who believe in Christ and have a sincere attachment to his cause persist in sustaining six churches of as many different sects in a community of twelve hundred people? Any man of sense will say, it is a monstrous waste of money and personal energy and ministerial talent,—a waste which the Christian community is utterly unable to afford; and so it is. If in the world of business like waste were perpetrated, if men would persist in building six steam flouring mills where one was quite sufficient to grind all the wheat produced, or in building and equipping six first-class railways, where one was amply sufficient for all the traffic, and in conducting

things in the same way in every other branch of business, nothing could come to that community but weakness, embarrassment and universal bankruptcy. This method is no better in religious than in secular things. Why then do we persist in it, in all the religious arrangements of our country, and to some extent of the whole Christian world? The answer is obvious. We have admitted an antichristian element into the constitution of the church, which insures its being constantly worked for the aggrandizement of sect rather than for the promotion of Christian interests. It always will be so worked, till we consent to eliminate that antichristian element from the constitution of the church of Christ.

As things now are, besides the papal church, which under the present order of things is sure to be ubiquitous, we have five great Protestant sects, which, in this country at least, are destined to be ubiquitous also. Their number may be increased, but there is not the faintest hope of any diminution. Besides these five, we have many sects which, though less universal than these, are yet widely prevalent, and two or three organizations of this class are likely to be found in almost every Christian community. It is therefore reasonable to expect, at least in all the more recently settled portions of our country, from six to eight distinct religious sects in every community. The experience of the past clearly shows in respect to them, that the conclusions drawn in the previous paragraphs are mournfully sustained by historic fact. Let any good man, endowed with whatever proportion of Christian zeal and persuasive eloquence, go to one of these communities so ruinously divided, and endeavor to persuade them to lay aside their divisions, and unite in one strong Christian church, and he will soon find an insuperable obstacle

to the success of his endeavors, in that zeal for sectarian aggrandizement which I have described ; nor will he ever be successful in his laudable endeavors, till he can persuade the Christian people of that community to return to the church of the apostles. That lust of power which stands opposed like an iron wall against all his endeavors will remain unbroken, while the sects retain their present organic principles. His best endeavors will be impotent and vain.

There is in the minds of Christian people an almost universal consciousness that sect is antichristian. The proof of this is almost constantly before our eyes. It has come to be a generally acknowledged truth, that there is scarcely any hope of a successful aggressive movement for the promotion of the kingdom of Christ, except on condition that Christians of different sects shall heartily co-operate in the effort, and forget as much as possible the lines of division which separate them. It is curious, it is sometimes almost ludicrous, to see how much pains good people will take to seem indifferent to sect on such occasions, and if possible to make the world forget that they are of different sects. If each of these organizations is a really valuable instrument for building up the kingdom of Christ in the world, why lay it aside on such an occasion? If it is helpful to ordinary work, why not to extraordinary? Why does it become useless and worse than useless as soon as men resolve to put forth unusual efforts for the promotion of those objects for the sake of which only the church exists? The fact that good people so generally admit that their sectarian relations to each other are in such circumstances harmful, is a virtual concession, that they are always harmful, that their real spirit and natural impression upon the minds of the people always present an obstruction to the proper influence of

Christianity upon the world. Why then as soon as the extraordinary effort is at an end, should the high tide of unsectarian co-operation recede to its ordinary level, and all the landmarks of sect become as obtrusively apparent as ever? Why do all the recruiting officers of sect now employ themselves each in gathering into his own little enclosure as many of the converts as possible? If sect is injurious in times of religious excitement and fervor, why not abandon it finally and forever, and so organize the sacramental host of God's elect, as to be always prepared to engage in the work of the Lord with utmost advantage? There is but one answer to such inquiries as these. There is something vicious in the very constitution of the church itself. In view of the principle which we have fully established in the progress of this work, there is no difficulty at all in ascertaining what it is which produces all this mischief. So long as the power of the keys is adhered to in the sense in which it has been understood for ages, each of these sects is a spiritual despotism, eager to extend its jurisdiction over the greatest possible numbers, and unscrupulous in the choice of its means for promoting its own aggrandizement. Sometimes for a little season the love of Christ will triumph over sect; but it will be only for a little season, the evil genius of sect will soon assert itself, and reduce all things again to the vulgar level of sectarian rivalry.

In the midst of this scene of painful conflict there are many devout persons who clearly perceive that sect is antichristian, and earnestly desire to avoid it. There is nothing for which they so intensely long as to build the church of Christ upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being himself the chief corner-stone. What shall such persons do? They intensely feel that the existing sects in a given commu-

nity are neither organized or worked in accordance with the divine conception, and that to unite with any of them is to consent to the perpetuity of the existing order of things. To organize a new Christian society on the true apostolic basis is to add another feeble and struggling church organization, to those which already divide and weaken a sect-distracted community. The question, What in such circumstances ought to be done? often occasions no small perplexity, and it may be impossible to lay down any general rule, which will be applicable to all cases. But surely the time has come, when that conception of the church which everywhere pervades the New Testament should be asserted, not only in words, but in practical organizations. It is one of the most hopeful symptoms of the time, that there are thousands of persons who can consent to no church organization on any other basis, not because they are sectarians, but because they are in principle averse to the whole sect system.

We cannot turn our eyes in any direction upon the religious scenery around us without encountering the most mournful illustrations of the principle asserted in this chapter. Surely it does not require argument to prove, that the Christian church should be in such a sense one, as to present no obstruction to the ready co-operation of all Christian people in any effort to promote the intellectual, moral and spiritual well-being of the whole community; or rather that it ought to facilitate and favor such co-operation. The man who does not know that the actual organization of the church presents obstacles nearly insuperable to all such co-operation knows very little of the real world he lives in. For example the city of Chicago, the existence of which dates back less than a half-century, has, either within itself or in its immediate vicinity, four theological

seminaries, all Protestant, all controlled by religious bodies that recognize each other as integral portions of the one blessed fellowship of Christ, all looking to the Scriptures as the one all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. All have then absolutely the same end in view,—to train up a teaching ministry, qualified to instruct mankind in the religion of the Bible. Substantially and for the great practical purposes of the Christian ministry, they have not four gospels, but one and the same gospel. The same gospel sermon will be equally acceptable in all their congregations.

Why then must there be four seminaries? The resources which each will require to furnish such an equipment as its friends deem necessary will run up into the millions. One seminary, costing very little more than each of them must cost if they remain separate, could do the work better than the four. Why then must their separate existence be maintained? In the scarcity of resources, why must they remain separately weak, while united they might be strong, and yet liberal Christian people be compelled to bear burdens which they are scarcely able to sustain, and which greatly limit their beneficence in every other direction? Again one answer only can be returned. The Christian people of these Northwestern States are organized under four distinct governments. Each of those governments claims to have possession of Peter's key, and wields it each in its own way as an instrument, and for the most part the only instrument, by which it asserts and exercises its authority. It constructs its own constitution, makes its own laws, establishes its own executive and its own judiciary, and enforces submission only by the exercise of its power of excluding from participation in Christian rites. Take this power away from each of them, and they would be dissolved and fall to

pieces as naturally as a mass of rock will crumble, when its particles lose the power of cohesion. Let each retain this organic force, and they will remain separate bodies politic, thoroughly imbued with zeal for self-aggrandizement, and eager to extend their jurisdiction as widely as possible. Each will no more readily intrust the education of its youth to the control and management of any other, than the government of England will intrust the adjudication of the rights of its subjects to the courts of France or Germany. Each regards the control of a theological seminary as an indispensable instrument of its power. As long as the separate governments exist, the four seminaries must exist also ; and we waste our breath and our eloquence in trying to show that this is bad economy, or that it is disastrous to Christian interests to however great an extent. The spirit of sect is utterly unscrupulous.

This is only one example of thousands. Our whole country, all christendom, is full of them. To seek a remedy is absolutely useless and hopeless, while the church of Christ continues to be constructed upon the sectarian principle as at present. If the Founder of Christianity conferred the power of the keys upon the church, and yet gave no explicit constitution to the church, and no definition of its powers, then he himself became responsible for the present factious condition of the church, and all its miserable consequences. With devout gratitude I affirm, not only that that power was never conferred by him, but that it is clearly and obviously contradictory to the law of the Messianic kingdom. It savors not of the things that are of God, but of the things that are of men.

It is necessary here distinctly to advise the reader, that I am quite aware that many persons will be disposed to urge an objection which will seem to them

quite conclusive against the previous argument. My argument all along assumes, that the power of the keys is essential to the very existence of the several sects as distinct bodies, and that if this were taken away, they would be disintegrated and cease to exist. The objection is, that the power of the keys is as necessary to the existence of the church itself, as of the various sects into which it is divided ; and that therefore if you divest the church of that power, it will be dissolved and cease to exist as certainly as they. It is therefore claimed, that in destroying sect I have destroyed the church as well. This is not the place to discuss the question which this objection raises. The reader may be fully assured however, that I have no intention of evading it, and that it shall be fully considered in a future chapter. I will in this place only suggest for the consideration of the reader, whether he may not have mistaken the nature of the cohesive attraction which binds the church of Christ together. May not its organization be produced and sustained by a force stronger than that of sect, and as consistent with individual liberty, as that is destructive of it ?

The current history of our times abounds with illustrations of the omnipresence, throughout christendom, of the antichristian spirit of ecclesiastical domination. The very atmosphere is poisoned by it. Events which should shock every devout man occur almost daily before our eyes, and are looked upon only as the normal incidents of our religious history. I can find space but for a single example. On a certain Sabbath in July, I believe, in the year 1867, Rev. Stephen H. Tyng, Jr., an accredited minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, and more and better than this, a minister of Christ whose praise is in all the churches, in accordance with a previous appointment,

preached to a congregation of men and women who had devoutly assembled to hear him, in the city of New Brunswick, New Jersey. Certain other Episcopal clergymen — men, as I am told on credible authority, of excellent Christian character and spirit — had charge of parishes in that city defined and described by the authority of the Protestant Episcopal Church. These brethren forbade Mr. Tyng's preaching at the time and place appointed, claiming that by so doing he would infringe upon their prerogatives as rectors of their respective parishes. Mr. Tyng thought the prerogative of a Christian minister was, to preach the gospel, not to forbid others to preach it, and that he ought to preach in that city on that day under his commission from the one Head of the church universal, and did so, disregarding the aforesaid prohibition.

Steps were immediately taken to bring him to trial and punishment for this act, as a violation of a law, a canon of the church. He was summoned before a court assembled by the authority and under the laws of a great national sovereignty, claiming and exercising a territorial jurisdiction coextensive with our national domain. Before that court Mr. Tyng appeared, and pleaded not guilty, thus acknowledging its authority. He submitted to all the forms of a trial for a criminal offence. He was condemned and sentenced, and that sentence was executed in one of the great metropolitan churches of this free country, by one of the highest officials of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Mr. Tyng went without compulsion to the place of execution, and stood up before the congregation to receive the sentence of admonition, which the court had awarded him for the crime of preaching the gospel of Christ in the city of New Brunswick. Mr. Tyng still remains a clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United

States, subject to that pretended authority which tried, condemned and punished him for his earnest fidelity to the Master. His abounding zeal and labors in behalf of the gospel of Christ secure to him the affectionate reverence of all the true followers of Christ. But let him be assured that millions have felt a sense of shame not to be expressed, at the humiliation of the Christian ministry which he permitted, by submitting himself to be thus trampled down by a usurping hierarchy. As I read the account of the transaction at the time, a sense of personal degradation came over me, and I feel the blush of shame rushing to my cheeks whenever I call it to remembrance.

The existence of this ambitious and grasping spirit in all the religious sects of modern times is so notorious as to be an admitted and assumed fact over all christendom. The apologists for sect may and will deny it. But under certain aspects of the subject, they in common with all other men will show that they admit and assume it. Nothing is more common in the literature of the time than the assertion, that under such a republican government as ours, the only assurance we can have that some one religious sect will not gain such an ascendancy, as to be able to control a majority of all the suffrages of the nation, overturn the present constitution of the country, and erect itself into a national religion, supported at the public expense, is found in the multiplicity of sects, and their jealousy of each other. This has passed even into a recognized principle of statesmanship. Some of our wisest statesmen have taught us to exult in the multiplicity of our sects, as affording our best possible security against the establishment of a state religion. I quote the following from James Madison: —

“In free governments the security for civil rights

must be the same as that for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects.”¹

There are very few Americans who would not without any hesitation accept this view of the case as sound and just. It may be regarded as an axiom in American politics. Who ever called it in question? But what is its meaning when translated into plain English? No one can hesitate a moment to answer. It is that all sects are not only ambitious and grasping for more power, but selfish and unscrupulous; that they are one and all watching their opportunity, like so many hungry beasts of prey, ready to devour, whenever the opportunity may be afforded, the liberties of their country and of mankind; and that our liberties are safe for a single year only because sects are so numerous and so intensely jealous of each other, that no one of them has any prospect of gaining such national ascendancy as would render the accomplishment of this flagitious purpose possible. According to this view of the subject, we continue to enjoy religious liberty in this country, not because it is the enlightened choice of the whole nation, but because its enemies are too numerous and too jealous of each other, ever to permit any one of them to accomplish its destruction; very much as Turkey retains its national independence, not by its own strength, but by the mutual rivalries of the other powers of Europe, each desirous to devour it.

This is a very serious subject, and worthy of the most earnest consideration of all who love the church of Christ. We deceive ourselves if we believe that the Christian religion can stand in such an attitude before

¹ Federalist, No. 51.

the world, without greatly damaging its claims, and to no small extent depriving it of the affectionate reverence of mankind. There are multitudes of men among us, who do intensely hate "the sects," as they call them, because they believe them to be actuated by just such a grasping and ambitious spirit, and who are perfectly confident that in hating "the sects" they are hating Christianity itself, because they regard the two things as entirely identical. That such men are very superficial thinkers is certainly not to be denied. But most men are superficial thinkers, and Christ came into the world to save them for all that. The position of the Christian church in the nineteenth century is eminently fitted to make just such an impression on millions of men, who are superficial thinkers, and eager to escape the moral restraints which the Christian religion imposes; and sect is driving such men to their utter ruin. Their mistake lies in assuming that Christianity is identical with sect. Let us thank God that it is not. But they are not mistaken in believing that the religious sects of the time do manifest in innumerable ways the selfish and ambitious spirit with which they are charged. Many of the facts referred to in this and the preceding chapters prove the justness of this charge beyond controversy.

Nor need we wonder, that while Christianity is, as at present, publicly manifested to the world almost entirely through these sects, millions of men are betrayed into the error of regarding Christianity and sect as identical. Such will always continue to be the fact, so long as the two things continue to stand in their present unnatural relations to each other. Sect is in its nature and spirit antichristian. God forbid it should any longer stand forth before the world as the representative of the religion of Jesus Christ. Sect is no better fitted to

represent the kingdom of Christ, than Satan is to represent God. If we ever mean truly to place before the world the glad tidings of the crucified and risen Christ, we must divorce Christianity from this unholy alliance with sect. The iniquitous bond cannot be too speedily sundered.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT IS THE REMEDY?

THE views which devout men take of the sect question are for the most part capable of being comprehended in two classes. First, there are many who acknowledge the evils which come from our sectarian divisions, and deplore them ; but they see no remedy, and therefore think it wise to bear them with patience and resignation, and render them as small as possible by cultivating everywhere a forbearing and fraternal spirit, and even by diverting as far as possible the public mind from the consciousness of their existence. If one is afflicted with an incurable disease, it is wise as far as he can to divert his own attention and that of his friends from its existence, and as far as in his power to behave in all respects as he would if he were in perfect health.

The other class is composed of those who think, that, inasmuch as there is no remedy, and sect is a phenomenon inseparable from religious freedom, it cannot be altogether evil. It must have its uses. Those uses they seek to find out, as they would seek for the uses of tornadoes, thunder-storms and pestilences ; and they think they have found them, and are therefore ready on all occasions to do battle in defence of sect by whomsoever assailed. Yet the real condition of their minds after all is that of making the best of the inevitable.

They never would have thought sect a good, if they had not first believed it to be an unavoidable consequence of that precious thing — religious freedom.

To each of these classes of persons the question which stands at the head of this chapter is equally interesting and important. If even the apologist for sect could see a clear and practicable remedy, by the application of which it could be removed from the Christian church, he would not be unwilling to be relieved from the burdensome task of vindicating a state of things which, at best, has in it so much that is repulsive and disgusting to every devout and spiritually cultivated mind. On the other hand, those who regard sect as an unmitigated but irremediable evil, would accept an intelligible and practicable remedy with sincere thankfulness, and engage in their Christian work with renewed energy and hopefulness. Certainly the application of a sound and effectual remedy to this class of evils would add immensely to the effectiveness of all Christian effort, and diminish the burdens under which Christian society labors. It was only in the hope of contributing something to the solution of this question, or at least of strengthening the belief that such a remedy would ultimately be found and applied, that this work was undertaken.

What then is the remedy? In general terms the answer of course is, that all Christian disciples must organize the church in all respects according to the pattern which our Lord has furnished us, and not only cheerfully consent but gladly make haste, to abandon all modes of organization which do not agree with that pattern. To this proposition I shall meet, on the very threshold of the discussion, the objection that there is no pattern. Nothing is more confidently asserted, or oftener repeated than that no church polity is laid down

in the New Testament. This point must therefore be carefully examined ; for if it may be certainly assumed that there must be a church polity, and yet that nothing of the sort is furnished in the New Testament, to seek a remedy for sect is manifestly absurd.

An intelligent view of this subject cannot be taken without first considering a previous question. What do we mean by a church polity? We must have a definition of that phrase, for without one it is obviously impossible to determine whether a church polity is found in the Scriptures or not. If I mistake not the reason why men so confidently assert that no church polity is found in the Scriptures is, that they have in their own minds a notion of the subject, which is contradictory to the conception according to which Jesus Christ intended to constitute the church, and are seeking to find that notion in the Scriptures. This point must be made plain. If we are searching the Scriptures for a church polity, we must know what we are looking for, or we shall not know whether it is there or not.

For fifteen centuries and more, one element has always been present in men's conceptions of a church polity. That element is the power of the keys in its historic sense. To this hour men search the Scriptures with the assumption preoccupying their minds, that there can be no platform of the church which does not provide for the exercise of that power, by defining the official and corporate machinery by which it is to be exerted, and the rules and methods of its action, and also for designating and inducting into office the men who are qualified and authorized to exhibit the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper to the people. If this is the church polity we are looking for, it is not at all strange we do not find it in the Scriptures, for it has already been shown that it is not there, and that it is

contrary to the divine conception according to which the church was founded.

Precisely at this point two great divisions of christendom diverge from each other. Prelatists and anti-prelatists approach this subject with the same assumption, — that any platform of polity must provide for the exercise of these fundamental elements of church power. The former examine the Scriptures, as supplemented by the customs and traditions of the church in the ages immediately subsequent to that of the apostles. They have no difficulty in finding in very early ages, certainly not later than the first half of the third century, the platform they desire, — a clergy invested with the power of the keys, existing in the three orders of bishops, presbyters and deacons. As this constitution of the church does not appear to have been a novelty in the times for example of Cyprian and Tertullian, the inference is confidently drawn, that this constitution of the church must have been derived from the apostles, and must therefore be obligatory on all Christian people everywhere. I make the assertion very advisedly. This is the only foundation of argument which prelacy has to rest upon. It does not, it cannot find that church polity which it seeks to impose on the consciences of all Christ's disciples in the New Testament taken only by itself, and interpreted according to the received laws of literary and historical criticism; but only as supplemented by the customs and traditions of the two subsequent centuries. The conclusion is made out only by reading those customs and traditions into the New Testament. The more a man knows of the religious, literary and social condition of those centuries, the more earnestly he will protest against such an interpolation of the apostolic records.

Anti-prelatists insist for the most part, that the

question must be decided by apostolic authority only, allowing little or no weight to the usages of after ages. It has already been sufficiently shown in these pages, that this is the only rational mode of treating the question. To look for the true idea of the Christian church in the second and third centuries is like looking for the true model of the Roman republic in the times of Trajan and the Antonines. Yet, in common with prelatists, they come to the study of the Scriptures with the undoubting assumption, that there can be no church polity which does not prescribe the mode of exercising the power of the keys, and of qualifying a clergy to officiate in administering the external rites of Christianity. It is certain they can find no such platform in the New Testament. Many do indeed suppose that they find such a platform in the directions given by our Saviour for dealing with an offending brother.¹ But a careful examination of those words shows that they have no relation to the government of the church, and give no support to the power of the keys as understood in the church history of subsequent ages, except by a misinterpretation so obvious and glaring, that its influence on the church through so many ages is humiliating to the Christian scholar. It cannot therefore but be conceded by anti-prelatists generally, that with their preconception of a church polity, no such thing can be found in the Scriptures. Still they doubt not, that that church power which has been described by the phrase "power of the keys" is Scriptural, and necessary to the government of the church, though they find no prescribed constitution by which it is to be exercised.

The conclusion from these premises is inevitable, that it must have been the intention of the founder of

¹ Matt. xviii : 15-20. See also Chap. IV., Part I.

Christianity to leave the constitution of the church to the taste and large discretion of all Christian people. The very flood-gates of sect are thus thrown wide open, and can never be closed again while these assumptions are adhered to. Any company of persons professing faith in Jesus Christ may construct a church according to any constitution they may devise or fancy, and in any local situation, and it will become at once invested with all the authority and sacredness of the Church of Christ, the kingdom of God on earth. This is sect in its elementary principle. This is what all church government must be, if we retain the power of the keys, and yet can find no church polity in the New Testament.

Yet the case of prelatists and anti-prelatists is not after all so very different as at first it might seem. The former are indeed enabled, by the help of the church history of the dark and superstitious ages which followed that of the apostles, to read between the lines of the New Testament a clergy in three orders empowered to govern the church in all ages. But the body of legislation by which that clergy is to govern is all left to man's device, without a hint from the divine Teacher. Who shall tell us which has the true system of ecclesiastical constitutions and laws, — the Byzantine church, or the papal, or the Anglican, or the reformed Episcopal? The only answer our prelatical friends can give us is, that we must ascertain which has the true apostolic succession. This affords very little light to our perplexed minds, while we entertain the undoubting belief, that it is demonstrable that no such succession exists. Rightly viewed, prelatical church polity is no less confused and anarchic than anti-prelatical. Under the dire necessity of constructing the government of the church of Christ according to the device of men are we

all left, if we insist on retaining that preconceived notion of a church polity, which has been for ages common to both these great divisions of Christendom.

Let us then at last consent to an altered statement of the problem to be solved. Let us no longer mean by a church polity a constitution and body of laws by which the power of the keys is to be exercised, but a clear exposition of the social relations in which our Lord intended that his people should stand to each other in this world. Let us admit that our Lord's words to Peter have been sadly misinterpreted and misapplied, and that baptism and the Lord's Supper are not intended to be in any sense instruments of government, but rites to be freely and fraternally observed by all the Lord's people, as divinely appointed symbols of fundamental Christian truth, and as badges to be voluntarily and lovingly worn by all his disciples. If, with such a conception of the nature of the problem, we search the Scriptures to find its solution, the difficulties, which before were insurmountable, will vanish, and we shall easily find in the apostolic records all the church polity we need.

What that polity is has been already sufficiently explained in the first six chapters of this book. It only remains to be shown that the conception of the church exhibited in those chapters, if accepted by the Lord's people will prove a sufficient remedy for the prevailing evils of sect. The general principle upon which it will act as a remedy may perhaps be made obvious by an illustration drawn from material things. If two substances having a strong affinity for each other, but strongly united in separate masses by cohesive attraction, are placed in external contact, no chemical combination will take place. They will remain separate, as though no affinity existed between the particles of which

they are composed. But if by any means their cohesive attraction is destroyed, and they are mingled in a state of minute division, chemical affinity will take effect, and new and permanent compounds will be formed.

This well illustrates the relation in which the disciples of Christ stand to each other under our sect system. Christian people are everywhere conscious of strong moral affinities tending to combine them in permanent relations far more fraternal and co-operative than those which at present exist. These conscious affinities are constantly counteracted by the various sectarian organizations by which they are separated from each other in their ordinary religious life and activity. No larger unity can be attained to, until by some means the cohesive attraction by which sects are held together can be broken up. Precisely this will be accomplished for the whole church of God under heaven, by adopting everywhere a true conception of the church as Jesus founded it. The cement which holds our sects together, and tenaciously prolongs their separate life, is found in those false assumptions of churchly and priestly powers, which have been pointed out in the previous chapters of this work. Eliminate those assumptions from the Christian mind of the world, and the most compact structures of ecclesiasticism on earth will fall to pieces ; and the individual disciples now embraced in them will be free to obey those spiritual affinities, which tend permanently to unite them in loving co-operation and fraternity with all that believe in Christ. It will not then be necessary to preach Christian union, and publish periodicals devoted to its advocacy. It will be produced by the operation of a permanent law of spiritual life. These effects will not be instantaneous and convulsive, but gradual and quiet, like the coming of spring after a long, cold winter, so gradual as to be

almost imperceptible ; but as irresistible as they are tranquil, and as genial and beneficent as the warm sunshine and soft breezes of spring. Sect will perish, because the principle of its life has been destroyed. Sectarian organizations will be dissolved and pass away, leaving not a wreck behind, because the cement that bound them together has ceased to exist.

Let us illustrate this by applying these principles to the solid and seemingly imperishable structure of the papal church. That is not only one of the sects, but it is the strongest and most compact of them all. Yet let that conception of the Christian church which has been set forth in these pages be accepted by the masses which compose that church, and that vast superstructure of superstition and spiritual despotism, now seeming to defy all the attacks of man, and the all-destroying power of time itself, would not endure for a single half-century. Take from the pope his pretended "keys of St. Peter," and he will be a pope no longer. Take from the priesthood its pretended power. to render sacraments valid, and of binding and of losing, and it will be a priesthood no longer. Let but the laity of the papal church see and accept that spiritual view of the kingdom of heaven which appears on the pages of the New Testament, and the chains of that spiritual despotism will fall from their souls, and they will walk forth in the freedom of the Lord. Meanwhile not one element of the spiritual power of the gospel will have been assailed or endangered ; not one attractive force that draws any man to Christ and to fraternal union with all the Lord's people will have been weakened, but all immensely strengthened.

There is no thoughtful Protestant who does not feel the baleful influence of Rome on all the religious interests of mankind. Let then all Protestants unite in

putting away from themselves every remnant and vestige of that system of church power in which all the strength of Rome is found, and which rests not on a scriptural foundation, but only on the traditions and usages of superstitious ages ; let all the millions of Protestantism lift up their hands freed from all the shackles of spiritual despotism ; let them one and all abjure that pretended power of the keys by which Rome has ruled christendom as with a rod of iron for more than twelve centuries ; let them lift up their multitudinous voices in united protest against all those priestly powers and functions by which men have been deceived and cheated of their liberty in Christ from the days of the early fathers ; let them show that Protestantism is not a failure, by exhibiting a spiritual union in the freedom of Christ grander than Rome ever produced by her boasted organic Catholicity ; let them consent to do all this, and they will then, and not till then, assail the papal power at the only point where it is vulnerable. When Protestants are ready to make such an onset on Rome, they may do it with some reasonable hope of success. Till then success is impossible. Several controversies of great vehemence have occurred in our day between champions of Rome and of Protestantism. But in the progress of those controversies it has become painfully apparent, that both combatants were on the same side of the question. You cannot overthrow popery without uprooting the power of the keys ; and you will not be likely to succeed in uprooting the power of the keys, while you yourself adhere to it.

The papal church is the prince of sects. It is easy to perceive, that the principles propounded in this volume would utterly subvert that sect, vast and strong as it is, and that without the least tendency to weaken the Christian faith of one of its adherents. It is just as

evident that these same principles are in like manner destructive of every other sect in christendom. If the remedy is applicable to the strongest and most compact of sects, it will be found equally effective when applied to a sect which is without compactness or centralization. Let us suppose that a Christian community is composed of persons who are quite homogeneous both in faith and government, except on questions pertaining to baptism. In respect to those questions they are divided, a part adhering to a Congregational, and a part to a Baptist church. With those views of the church now generally accepted, this division seems likely to be perpetuated through all the future, with all the evil consequences which usually spring from such a division. If the church in its corporate capacity is charged with the duty of guarding the Lord's Supper, and excluding from it all who are disloyal to the Master, must it not regard as disloyal those who refuse to submit to the rite of baptism according to his command? Can persons who have in no otherwise been baptized than by sprinkling in infancy be regarded as giving evidence of loyalty? But if the power of the keys has been abandoned, if men approach the Lord's Supper only by the invitation of the Master, and accountable to him alone for the sincerity of their faith and love, the sectarian line which divides Congregational and Baptist churches will disappear. Close communion will no longer exist on either side. The whole question will be referred on both sides, not to the authority of the church in its corporate capacity, but to individual conscience and conviction, and to the final adjudication of the one Head of the church universal. In neither church will the Lord's Supper be any longer employed as an instrument for enforcing any views or practices in respect to the rite of baptism. That community will be divided by a

sectarian line no longer. If both churches are strong, and both houses of worship are needed for the accommodation of the people, both organizations may be retained because the general good seems to require it. But if they are weak and the support of two congregations is burdensome, no insuperable obstacle will exist in the way of uniting them in one. In either case the way has been prepared for the complete and harmonious co-operation of that whole community in every good Christian enterprise. The schism has been healed, and they are one in Christ as they should be.

If the same change should take place in all Congregational and Baptist churches in respect to their views of this matter, the line which has so long divided these two sects, and often with very bitter consequences, would everywhere fade out and no longer be traceable. If certain Congregational churches were still called Baptist, that word would have lost its sectarian signification, and only retain a historic meaning. Sparse populations with scanty resources would no longer be burdened with the necessity of supporting two churches where one could do the work much better. There would no longer be any motive for maintaining separate colleges, theological seminaries, missionary organizations, periodical publications and religious literatures. These would all be things of the past, remembered with sorrow, mingled however with grateful joy for our deliverance from them. Ephraim would no longer envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim.

It may be said in reply to this, that this result might have been attained without relinquishing the corporate guardianship of the church over the Lord's Supper, that the principle might have been adopted, that in the exercise of that guardianship, none should be excluded except those who failed to furnish evidence of being true

disciples of Christ. To this suggestion I make two replies. First, I refuse to forget that the real question at issue is whether the Founder of the church intended to commit such a guardianship of the Lord's Supper to the church in its corporate capacity. Till it can be shown that he did, I must refuse to co-operate in establishing such a guardianship from considerations of expediency without his authority. Second, the line which it is proposed to draw is too tenuous and indefinite to be distinctly discerned and effectually guarded by any human tribunal. If the church is by corporate and judicial action to exclude from the Lord's Supper all who fail to give evidence of being true disciples of Christ, this rule will receive as many different interpretations as there are different tribunals, or rather as there are different cases to which it is to be applied. Our judgments as to what constitutes evidence of true discipleship differ very widely, according to the varying moods of feeling we may happen to be in, and the different standpoints we may occupy. In times of intense controversy, we judge very severely of everything which stands opposed to us, and churches are tempted to erect their own opinions on points at issue into tests of communion. Thus the embittered parties of one generation become the permanent and no less embittered sects of generations that come after. This is not theory but historic fact. The human mind cannot be relied on wisely and righteously to apply such a principle.

This perhaps is a suitable place to fulfil an assurance which was given to the reader in a former chapter, that the objection should be fairly met, that the same solvent which it is proposed to apply to sect would dissolve the church also. It is perhaps not too much to assume, that the candid reader is convinced that the remedy proposed would heal the schism about baptism which

has existed for generations among Congregationalists. Can he show that it has any tendency whatever to weaken one of the social ties which bind the disciples of Christ together? Has it taken from the church anything but the power to tyrannize over the consciences of individual disciples? That power the Protestant churches carried along with them when they separated from Rome, and have adhered to it and fondly cherished it as though it were an indispensable bond of union. It is a grievous delusion. It has never been a bond of union, but a force of repulsion, a wedge of division. The whole pathway of Protestant church history is thickly strewn with the wrecks it has caused. In our efforts to find a remedy for sect, we have proposed to deprive the church of this power, by proving that the exercise of it is a usurpation. But in proving that, we do not break or weaken one of all the attractive forces which tend to bind the disciples of Christ together in perpetual and universal fraternity. We have not denied catholicity, but only shown that the catholicity of the church of God is not political and organic, but moral and spiritual. The church is not held together by governments administered by human hands, by judicial decrees and penal sanctions, but by faith in Christ and the free, spontaneous attractions of his love. The solvent which it is proposed to apply to sect acts only on the baser and more destructible materials which are found in the compound, while over the pure gold of truth and love it has no power at all.

Perhaps some may still feel an apprehension, that though the remedy proposed may not directly attack the purely moral and spiritual forces which bind Christians together, it does weaken and perhaps destroy all motives and inducements to any organic and visible church. It has already been shown that the only

organic form in which Christianity did manifest itself in apostolic times was that of the local church, and I have certainly no unwillingness to admit that it is only through the power of the keys that any other organization of the church than the local has been rendered possible in any subsequent age. Is it then contended that without the power of the keys local churches also become impossible? Does the objector mean to assume, that the churches founded by the apostles did exercise that power, that the exercise of it was the only purpose for which they existed, and that without it their existence, even in apostolic times, would have been impossible? If he does not mean this, his objection is obviously of no validity. If he does mean it, he must prove his assertions. This he will find a very difficult undertaking. If this was the condition of the possible existence of the churches founded by the apostles, and the sole object for which they existed, it is strange indeed that the apostolic writings contain no proof that the power of the keys was known to those churches. If there was another object for which those churches existed, that object would have furnished the occasion of their existence, and that occasion would be as lasting as the church of God on earth.

There was and is and always will be such an occasion wherever Christian faith and love exist. It will always and everywhere be true as it was in the times of the apostles, that men dwelling together in the same communities, having a common faith in Jesus Christ, and common Christian aims and hopes, will be impelled by very strong social instincts to unite themselves together in permanent societies, not for the purpose of lording it over individual conscience, but for mutual sympathy, co-operation, edification and helpfulness. These social instincts are the forces which in every age have united

Christians together in the local church, wherever these instincts have not been counteracted by the exercise of usurped ecclesiastical power.

To assert that men will not join the local church if they are permitted to participate in the Lord's Supper, without membership in it, is not only gratuitous, but in direct opposition to evidence the most abundant and decisive. I believe the largest Protestant Church in christendom is that of Mr. Spurgeon, in London. No church can be found the members of which are drawn together by stronger or more enduring ties ; yet in that church access to the Lord's table is independent of membership in it or any other church. Every communicant approaches the table only as a disciple of Christ, acting on his own individual responsibility to God. The rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper are regarded and treated as belonging, not to the organized local church, but to the church inorganic and universal. Many examples may be adduced in this country in which the same experiment has been tried for many years with the same results.

It may still seem to some to require further proof that this remedy is really of universal application. It has been shown to be applicable to the most centralized and compact, and to one of the least compacted of existing sectarian combinations. But it may still be doubted by some, whether there are not intermediate forms to which it would be found inapplicable. There is a class of writers who have certainly done much to set this whole subject in a clear light, whose views of the particular matter now to be considered seem open to grave criticism.¹ They rightly affirm that in our

¹ I refer particularly to Archbishop Whately's *Kingdom of Christ Delineated*, and G. A. Jacob's *Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament*.

efforts to construct the church, we must exclude nothing which is required, and include nothing which is forbidden by Christ and the apostles. But they also tell us that there are many matters touching the organization and government of the church, respecting which the apostolic records are silent. No instructions are given. Respecting these, we are told that Christian people are left to their own discretion, and may freely use their own taste and judgment. Thus they seem to teach that, as the judgment of different individuals and different groups of individuals may be very unlike in reference to such matters, widely diverse constitutions of the church may coexist among the same people, and may all be equally legitimate, and equally acceptable to the Master. This conclusion can only be accepted under very important limitations, and with very careful distinctions.

It cannot be denied that there are cases in which the absence of any command or prohibition would leave a Christian people at liberty to adopt such social arrangements as might seem expedient or necessary. There are no direct instructions anywhere that Christians should unite in organized societies. But the apostles have set us an example which teaches us, that though such organizations are not commanded, they are expedient and proper. They were actually entered into, wherever converts were made by apostolic preaching. We are not told in any direct command, what officers should be appointed in particular churches, or what functions they should perform. Yet we find that there were officers in those churches, though it is not possible to determine how many, or what were their functions. Does it then follow that any company of persons professing to be Christians may organize a church wherever they please, without regard to any Christian organiza-

tions already existing, and upon any constitution which may suit their fancy? When they have so constituted the church, will its title be good to all the sacredness and all the moral authority which belongs to the church of Christ? Especially, may such a voluntary society assume the guardianship of the Lord's Supper, and use it as the principal instrument of government? If so, to seek a remedy for sect is a waste of time and labor. According to these principles, sect was intended to be the normal condition of Christian society. If these conclusions are to be accepted, to what purpose have such men as Archbishop Whately and G. A. Jacob employed themselves, in reconstructing the polity of the apostolic churches? It may be rendered quite plain that the apostles constructed churches according to a certain model, but it would not follow that we are to conform to that model. They built according to their wisdom and discretion. We are equally at liberty to use our own judgment. By laying down such a principle as that just stated, these men have rendered their own work quite worthless, except for rebuking the exclusiveness of any who think their form of the church is holier or better than any other. If we accept their view of this matter, the influence of what they have written will be to promote general indifferentism in relation to the whole subject of sect and church polity. One polity will be esteemed just as good and legitimate as another. Men will be encouraged lazily to adhere to the sect of their fathers, or that into which accident may have thrown them; and sectarian anarchy will go on perpetually weakening and disgracing the church of God.

There can hardly be any danger of falling into error by assuming, that this principle must be subject to very important limitations. One limitation is obvious at a

glance. That which is nowhere forbidden in words may yet be forbidden in a very decisive manner, by the known aim and spirit of the institution, and by general principles clearly inculcated. There is not anywhere a verbal prohibition of the exercise of the power of the keys. Neither is it anywhere commanded. It is one of the omissions of the New Testament. Does it hence follow, that in constructing the church we are at liberty so to assume that power, as to make it the chief instrument of church government and discipline? It has been already abundantly shown, that by that very assumption the church was corrupted and enslaved for centuries, and that the principle is contradictory to the aim and spirit of the church and of Christianity itself. Is not this a sufficient prohibition? Is it not stronger even than a direct prohibition in words? Its true import is, that such a constitution of the church is so foreign to its nature and spirit, that it is not for one moment to be thought of. If Jesus had intended such a church government, he would have instituted and required it. And yet to institute and require it, was to nullify his whole work, and contradict the essential aim and spirit of his mission.

We cannot then, after having been driven to the necessity of relinquishing the power of the keys as a power divinely conferred for the government of the church, restore it again on the plea that, though not specifically granted, it is nowhere directly forbidden. It is indirectly forbidden, by the general aim and spirit of Christianity, as illustrated by centuries of mournful experience. I see no reason to fear that any of those forms of organization which have divided christendom for centuries could maintain their separate existence for a single century, after being deprived of it. To every one of them it is the instrument of government to the

use of which they resort in the last extremity ; or to change the figure, it is the nucleus around which the whole system of government is constructed. Take it away, and they will inevitably fall to pieces ; and the Christian people that compose them will be left free to obey those moral affinities of faith and love, which tend to draw all Christian disciples into a universal spiritual brotherhood.

There may still be a question whether the attractions of the forms and the liturgy and the clerical vestments of the Anglican and Papal churches, or the standards and catechisms of the Presbyterian churches, or the itinerant ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church may not have in them sufficient vital force to sustain these organizations in separate existence, after the power of the keys shall have been abandoned. I prefer to discuss this question in another place, where each of these forms of church organization will be separately considered.

There is however another limitation of the principle, that in the constitution of the church we are at liberty to adopt whatever is not prohibited, which is of a general character, and should therefore be considered in this place. It is, that whatever liberty of choice a group of Christians worshipping together may have in respect to things which are neither required nor forbidden, they have no right to assume any legislative powers, by the exercise of which they will deprive other Christian people of the same liberty. For example, it may be quite right that the pastor of a particular worshipping assembly should write out the prayers he uses in conducting public worship, and read them from his manuscript, or that he should read them from a printed volume. Such a method may suit the judgment of the pastor and be agreeable to the people. But if that congregation

enacts a law, that the pastor *shall* use a prescribed form in prayer, it injuriously and wrongfully limits the pastor's liberty of public teaching, and usurps authority which it never received from the Master.

Still more if a confederation is formed of many congregations, and a body composed of officers or representatives of those congregations enacts a law that all the congregations so confederated shall use in public worship only a prescribed form of words, a great wrong is done. The Lord's people are deprived of that liberty of worship which is the gift of God to all. The representatives of twenty congregations met in deliberative assembly can have no right to dictate to one congregation the words in which only it shall approach to God. That congregation may know that it has common wants and social longings which those words do not express, and to forbid their giving social utterance before God to those common longings of many hearts, is a high-handed usurpation. It is a violation of that freedom of the social instincts of devout men, out of which the organization of particular congregations for the worship of God springs.

Such a confederation of churches, or any assembly of church officials exercising such powers over particular Christian congregations, is sure sooner or later to be a source of strife, debate, division and anarchy. It may be said, and said truly, that a prayer read from a book is just as acceptable to God as one expressed in the words of the moment without the book, and that therefore it must be immaterial whether the prayer is offered in one form or the other. Very true, and for that very reason it is a tyrannical usurpation for any man or any assembly of church officials to dictate to a worshipping congregation, which of these forms it shall adopt; or in other words to make that a matter of

ecclesiastical law, which God left free to the discretion of his people. This principle is of universal application. All ecclesiastical legislation in respect to things neither commanded nor forbidden is high-handed spiritual tyranny. It is a usurpation of authority over matters which the Lord has left free to the sound discretion of his people. When this principle is universally admitted, sect will be of the number of the things that were but are not.

The question may still arise whether diversities of opinion on matters of this sort may not after all produce divisions of particular local churches. It must undoubtedly be admitted that such divisions are among the things that are possible. But let us thank God that they are only possible, not probable. When churchly and priestly power are quite withdrawn from such questions, the spirit of Christian forbearance and charity will seldom fail to dispose of them in a manner honorable to the Christian brotherhood. If, in occasional instances, such should not be the fact, the resulting divisions would be only local and temporary, and the wounds they would cause would be soundly healed by the growth of Christian charity. It is only by the power of the keys that organized churches have ever been able to convert matters which the Lord left to wise and enlightened discretion, into those permanent and unchanging ecclesiastical enactments, by which sects maintain their separate existence from generation to generation.

Perhaps to some of my readers I shall seem, both in this chapter and in that on the origin of the sects of modern christendom, to have entirely overlooked the gravest cause of the evil. That cause it will perhaps be said lies back of all questions of organization and polity, in the great moral depravity of human nature

itself, and in the low and very imperfect style of Christian character which prevails in the church itself. I often hear it asserted that if the church in all its branches was composed of Christ-like men and women, it would matter little what its constitution might be. Christian people would be so thoroughly joined in heart, that their division into sects could do little harm. The whole cause of the mischief, it is said, is the sectarian spirit, and changing the constitution of the church would do little good.

This seems plausible, and by many is accepted as eminently wise and pious. But it is surely fallacious. As well might it have been said in our terrible conflict with African slavery, The system is well enough, if only we had good men and women to work it. The system was not well enough. It powerfully tended to convert even good men and women into selfish and cruel tyrants. It is so with sect. It will not let Christian people who really do love the brethren, manifest their love in mutual confidence and co-operation for the kingdom of Christ. It separates them from each other by walls of partition, which hinder mutual acquaintance, and obstruct the flow of Christian sympathy, and produce an isolation which fills their minds with the notion that they have rival religious interests to which they attach much of the sacredness which belongs to the gospel itself. We fervently love those with whom we habitually co-operate in endeavors to promote the most cherished ends, and are very strongly tempted to hate those who are counter-working our sacred religious plans and efforts. Sect constantly throws the best men into such false relations to each other, and tempts them to regard each other as enemies for Christ's sake, not friends. He who does not know that this is the practical working of sect knows nothing of the subject.

Men of the purest intentions are placed in a position so false that they are made to believe, that the defence and enlargement of their sect is indispensable to the prosperity of the kingdom of Christ, and are driven by the stress of what seems to them "denominational necessity" to do things which they would scorn to do for their own private interests. The sacredness of the end justifies the means, and they are far less scrupulously conscientious in their religious life than in their common secular business. The constitution of the church, it is said, is well enough, if only we had a satisfactory style of Christian character; yet this very vicious constitution of the church poisons the moral atmosphere of christendom with a baleful miasma, from the morbid influence of which none can escape. Beings of angelic wisdom and purity might be able to pass their lives under such conditions without suffering much harm, but it is certain few men are wise and strong enough to resist such temptations. If indeed it is true, which I doubt not, that the style of character in the Christian church has great need to be elevated and improved, in order that she may accomplish her mission in the world, then is it indispensable that these Pontine marshes in which she dwells should be so thoroughly drained, that she may breathe the pure air of the kingdom of heaven.

I do not by any means claim that the reform advocated in these pages will at once secure the complete realization of the divine conception. Those selfish and hateful passions which in greater or less degree mar all the associations of men, will intrude themselves into the church in every possible mode of organization, disturb its peace and impair its purity and power. The enemy will still sow tares among the wheat, and they will not be separated from it till the time of the harvest. Their

presence will never be harmless ; bitter strifes and local divisions will still take place, and bring reproach upon the Christian name. But they will be only local, and will endure only till the local irritation that produced them has passed away. Any such parcelling out of the followers of Christ under permanent rival governments coextensive with the limits of christendom, as that which we witness, will become and forever remain impossible. A great permanent cause of corruption and weakness in the church of God will have been effectually removed.

CHAPTER V.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

It must not be supposed that in the previous discussion I have been unmindful of an objection which has no doubt been constantly in the minds of many readers,—that if this view of the church prevails, there is an end of all church discipline. It has not been overlooked for a moment, but only deferred till the proper place for considering it should be reached. It will doubtless be regarded by many as an insuperable objection against the remedy for sect which was proposed in a previous chapter. They will seem to themselves to reason with unanswerable conclusiveness when they say, Let us bear all the evils of sect rather than give up the discipline of our churches. So any Christian man would say, if by church discipline is meant that system of moral and spiritual nurture which the Founder of the church meant to institute for the perfecting of the saints. But a more careful examination of the subject may show, not only that the application of that remedy will not destroy the discipline of the church, but that it is absolutely necessary to its successful application and use.

In considering this subject our first inquiry must respect the nature and aim of church discipline. If we derive our notions of the subject from church history, our definition of church discipline must be,—the exertion of ecclesiastical authority, to guard the Lord's

Supper from being profaned by the intrusion of unworthy participants, and to punish those who are guilty of violating moral duty or ecclesiastical law, by depriving them of the privilege of participating in that rite. If any one is disposed to call in question the justness of this statement, I have only to refer him to the standard literature of the question. That it is a true account of the spirit and import of discipline in the papal church surely needs no argument to prove. That the same is true in the Protestant churches of the Reformation, is certainly no less obvious. If any one will consult the chapter on this subject in Calvin's Institutes,¹ he will find no reason whatever to doubt as to his view of the matter. He uses the "power of the keys." He assumes it to be the chief instrument of church government. He speaks of the punishments to be inflicted by the church on the guilty, and argues that they should be meted out according to the degree of criminality. There is no reason to suppose that his views of the subject differed from those generally held in the reformed churches, or that those churches have ever renounced them. Many of us know well that substantially the same view of the subject has been tenaciously held in our own churches, and in our own times, and have vivid and painful memories of having seen them applied in practice. It may be true that in the Episcopal churches of Great Britain and the United States, church discipline has for generations scarcely existed. But it is not because the principle has been abandoned or renounced, but only because it has been neglected, and has thus passed into disuse. There is no valid ground for calling in question the definition above given of church discipline historically considered.

¹ Calvin's Institutes, Book IV., Chap. XII.

When it is objected that the view of the church put forth in these pages will put an end to such church discipline as is described by this definition, the charge will be at once admitted. But it will be maintained that so far is this from being a valid objection, that such church discipline has been the corrupter of the church for ages, and that it must be brought to an end, in order that the church of Christ may ever exert its legitimate influence in the world.

Two almost omnipresent causes have already rendered the practical exercise of such church discipline nearly impossible, in all the Protestant churches. These two causes are, — a general revulsion of feeling throughout christendom against it as contradictory to the prevailing spirit of Christianity, — and the multiplication of sects, nullifying the discipline of each other by their mutual rivalries. It is the sorrowful complaint of thousands in our churches that church discipline has become obsolete. The influence of these two causes in producing this result deserves to be considered.

As to the first, little need be said. The appeal is not to argument, but to experience, and to the moral sentiments and affections of devout men and women everywhere. Doubtless there are cases of flagrant immorality in members of the church, in which the proof is of such a character as to leave no possibility of doubt of the guilt of the accused, in respect to which the disciplinary process can be pushed to the final step of excommunication, without producing any disturbance of the harmony and good feeling which should pervade the whole social life of a Christian church. But when the offence charged is less enormous, or the proof not such as to command absolute or universal assent, one might appeal with great confidence to the experience of all Christian people, as to the baleful influence of church discipline

as ordinarily conducted. The probable occurrence of it is looked forward to with a painful dread, which words can but inadequately express. The spirit of litigation which is likely to be elicited, the intensely excited parties that are likely to be formed, the hatreds that are likely to be engendered and perpetuated, and the unfavorable impression likely to be made on the community by the seemingly harsh and denunciatory character of the final sentence of excommunication, with all the historic associations that cluster around that word, or even if those associations are not taken into the account, by the debarring of one deemed a brother or a sister from participation in a divinely appointed religious rite, by the exercise of church authority, — all this and much more will be sure to come into the remembrance of all who have had much experience of such proceedings, and cause the probable recurrence of them to be regarded with painful apprehension and alarm. In the present and probable future condition of religious and social sentiment, nothing of the kind will be attempted, except in circumstances of the most urgent necessity, and in cases so plain as to forbid any expectation of the occurrence of a conflict in respect to them. Disciplinary processes will be very rarely resorted to, and moral delinquencies in members of the church will be overlooked and neglected, in which the reputation of the church for moral purity will be greatly injured, and religion itself deeply disgraced.

The harshness of the word "excommunication" is not entirely historic in its origin. It has not come entirely from the horrid ecclesiastical tyranny of past ages, or from the still retained anathemas of the papal church. It is partly caused by the nature of the case and the transaction. If we view this subject from the standpoint of Christianity, if we believe

that Jesus is the Messiah of God crucified for the sins of the world, if in prophetic anticipation of that crucifixion, he instituted this rite, and required all who believe in him for salvation to unite in the observance of it, then is it an exceedingly grave proceeding when the church, composed of frail and erring men, (and all men are frail and erring,) pronounces on one of its members a judicial sentence of perpetual exclusion from the privilege of participating in it. In the nature of the case the community will always regard such a sentence as harsh, except when it is pronounced against persons notoriously guilty of very flagrant crimes. Whenever such a sentence is proclaimed in any modern community, it may well be anticipated, that it will create heart-burnings and inflict wounds which will not soon be healed ; and the more reverence men have for the rite, the harsher the proceeding will seem, and the greater the shock which it will occasion. If it can be shown that Jesus Christ invested his church with such an authority, and laid on it such a responsibility, in order to protect the sanctity of the rite, and guard the honor of his name, then the church must do it, however difficult the task, and whatever unpopularity she may incur in the doing of it. But if Christ has made no such grant of authority, it would surely be wise for the church to abstain from the exercise of a function so difficult and delicate. Of one thing we may easily render ourselves quite sure by a little reflection. The sentence of excommunication will hereafter be very rarely pronounced from Protestant pulpits. Protestant churches recognize the obligation of doing that which experience shows they cannot do. Nobody will be excommunicated except those who have already excommunicated themselves by their infamous lives.

The other cause which renders discipline impossible

is the multiplication of sects, and their rivalries with each other. The theory of the subject is, that every true church of Christ is an ecclesiastical court, empowered by the Master to receive charges against any communicant, hear and weigh evidence, and judicially to decide whether the charge is proved, and, if the accused is found guilty, pass sentence of excommunication upon him, unless the condemned person shows satisfactory evidence of repentance. But the working of this theory is sadly obstructed by the fact that, however numerous the sects in a community, each church of whatever sect is a court of Jesus Christ in presence of every other, and with independent jurisdiction. There is constant reason to apprehend, that the sentence of one court will be set aside and treated as a nullity by the equally valid decisions of another court just over the way. The community at large has just as much respect for one of these tribunals as for the other. Discipline is constantly liable to be wholly neutralized, and the whole proceeding to be rendered abortive, and in the eyes of the community contemptible. What sort of a government of the church of Christ must that be, in which in every little community, there are several rival courts of Jesus Christ, each with independent jurisdiction? Each sect may in this way govern itself in some sort, but by such an arrangement the government of the one church of Jesus Christ is rendered impossible. It is not government but anarchy.

This evil is greatly aggravated by the sharp rivalries between churches belonging to different sects, for the increase of their numbers and their revenues. Persons who find themselves or their friends annoyed and harassed by the discipline to which they are or have been or are likely to be subjected, will easily escape the annoyance by withdrawing from such a church, and

connecting themselves with another, in which perhaps discipline is less stringent, or where they have reason to suppose their own personal importance will be a protection against its exercise. Or they will withdraw from the church altogether, and occupy a position outside its pale ; and it cannot be denied, that the respect of the community for the church and its discipline has been so much impaired by these rivalries of sect, that such a position may be occupied with little danger of suffering any loss of respectability and social consideration. There is no man that reflects on the social scenery around him, who will not perceive, that this picture is true to life, and that it indicates a state of public opinion in which any exercise of what is commonly called "church discipline" is quite impossible. There are very many in our churches who deeply deplore and severely censure this decay of discipline, as a sad indication of the degeneracy of the times ; but the very persons who utter these complaints have not themselves the courage to face the difficulties which present themselves, to initiate disciplinary processes, and push them to the final issue.

If then it is an objection to the doctrines of the church set forth in these pages, that their adoption would put an end to our traditional church discipline, it should not be forgotten, that the influence which they might exert in this respect has already been anticipated by a wide-spread conviction that such an exercise of discipline is contrary to the aim and spirit of the gospel, and injurious to the proper influence of the Christian religion ; and that that very multiplication of sects which I at least deplore, renders the exercise of any discipline at all in the churches nearly impossible. No well-informed Christian man will deny, that at the present time all discipline of the church of Christ is rapidly

falling into hopeless decay, and something must be done to save it from utter extinction.

It is not only admitted but maintained, that what is commonly called "church discipline" does depend primarily and chiefly on the power of the keys, and that that power is a usurpation in the household of God, which should be utterly abolished. It is therefore undeniably true, that if the doctrines of this book are generally accepted, such church discipline will entirely and forever cease; not merely as now, because it is found to be impracticable, but because it is seen to be contradictory to the spirit of the gospel. What then? Is this the only possible discipline of the church of God? If this is given up must all church discipline be forever abandoned? It now remains to be shown, that this is so far from being the truth, that the entire abandonment of this conception of the subject is an indispensable condition of restoring to the church the true discipline of Jesus and the apostles. The discipline of which I have thus far spoken is directly and flagrantly in contradiction to that which Jesus clearly indicated his intention to establish for the spiritual edification of his people. To that the reader's attention must now be invited.

The most comprehensive statement which can be made of the church discipline of the Scriptures is, that its aim is, not to punish the guilty, not to protect the Lord's Supper from profanation, not even to put unworthy members out of the church, but to reclaim, restore and save those who fall into sin. There is no hint that Jesus ever did commit to the church in its corporate capacity the function of detecting and punishing crime. No one can for a moment think so, who will reflect on the spirit of the whole Christian scheme. Christ did not come to condemn, but to reclaim and to

save. The whole design and aim of the first coming of the Messiah was to call sinners to repentance. He established his kingdom in the world to co-operate with him in that one design of his mission. He is to come again, to judgment. But that judgment will be without any intervention of any fallible human tribunal. In it the whole multitude of the redeemed will indeed be joined with him. But it will not be by acting as a human tribunal, with all the infirmities and liabilities to error which pertain to all which is human and earthly, but by the united manifestation of that truth of God, according to which that judgment will proceed. The proposition that Jesus Christ committed to his church in its earthly and human organization the function of detecting and punishing sin is, in view of the abundant declarations which he made in respect to the design of his coming, in the highest degree improbable and incredible. When the brotherhood of a particular church, or a church officer no matter how high in station, or a board of church officers no matter how exalted in titles and dignities, assumes to occupy the judgment-seat for the purpose of detecting and condemning the guilty, and sentencing him to appropriate punishment, we may be sure that a function has been usurped which Jesus never conferred. God has indeed committed all judgment to the Son ; but the Son will exercise it in his own person, and has never committed it to any community of frail and fallible men.

If I am here met^d by the papal interpretation, that Jesus promised to remove the fallibility of his church by his own personal presence, I answer, that a promise to be with his people is far enough from a promise to invest them either with personal or corporate or official infallibility. It is a promise to be at hand to help them in all their struggles and conflicts, and to give

them the ultimate victory. He was with Peter and praying for him, when he denied his Lord. Still more is this promise far removed from securing infallibility to the church, when she assumes the exercise of a function never committed to her by the Master. It is a previous question which must be judged of by independent evidence, whether Christ ever intimated an intention to commit to the church the function of judgment and punishment. There is no hint or intimation that he did, and the strongest possible evidence in the spirit and aim of the Messianic mission, that he did not. Nothing therefore can be more groundless than the claim of a divine promise of infallibility in the performance of it. An interpretation so loose, so unsupported by evidence, can never sustain the huge superstructure which men have sought to rear upon it.

Nor is there any intimation that Jesus instituted a system of police, to protect the Lord's Supper from profanation by the participation of unworthy persons in it. There is not only an entire absence of any specific provision for such a police court, but such an institution would be exceedingly foreign to the general spirit of Christianity. Jesus came to the world with no weapon either of defence or aggression, but the word of the Lord. That is the only sword of the Spirit. On it alone he relied for his own protection, and he left his church and his gospel in the world with no other armor either offensive or defensive. The claim that he surrounded the ceremonies which he instituted with a human guardianship to be administered by human hands, is so foreign to the spirit of his whole life as to be utterly incredible. Men have devised such a guardianship and gloried in the invention ; but it is through that very device that these rites have been most fearfully corrupted and profaned for ages. By that very

device bad men have not only gained access to them, but have usurped control over them, and made them the instruments of the most terrific spiritual tyranny ever imposed upon men. The severest wounds which Jesus has ever received in the world have been in this house of his friends. It is not on any human tribunal, or any police court that Jesus relied for protecting the sacred rites of Christianity from profanation.

Nor can we rely on church courts and judicial processes to prevent the intrusion of bad men into the church. Doubtless flagrant cases of wickedness do sometimes occur in the church, which impose on her the necessity of casting out the offender. But her main reliance for the purity of her membership must always be on the same word of the Lord. That must be the attractive power by which men are drawn to the church of God. Penitent believers in Christ alone will feel that attractive force. The same word of the Lord is the flaming sword pointing every way, to guard the tree of life from the intrusion of those who would approach it for profane and selfish purposes. If the gospel in its primitive purity and power is in the church, in the pulpit and in the pews, in its prayers and praises and teaching voices, and in the lives of its members, impenitent guilt will not be much tempted to intrude into it. The moral standard by which it tries all life and character will be intolerable to wicked men, who are determined to persist in their iniquities. This is the power of God by which alone the church can be governed, and the purity of its membership be preserved. When the gospel goes out of the church, wicked men will intrude into it, and make it a den of thieves, all the more easily and certainly as it has a strong political and judicial organization.

No judicial processes however organized and pro-

vided for can rid the church of unworthy members. Persons openly scandalous and infamous in their lives can be cast out, and indeed we may hope generally will be. But we are all aware, that there are innumerable modes of sin, so subtle, so well concealed under the external forms of decency and propriety, so utterly incapable of technical definition, that no tribunal can deal with them. They baffle all official or judicial sagacity or scrutiny. Yet every one discerns their presence and feels their turpitude. They are often so mean and hateful, as to render their presence in the church and under the garb of devotion a spectacle disgusting to behold, disgraceful to the Christian brotherhood, and a reproach to our religion. It is by such forms of sin rather than by crimes which can be technically defined, that the church is chiefly dishonored. Yet in the organic disciplinary processes of the church under any of its forms, there can be no protection against such cases. No judicial processes can reach them. It is to be hoped such men may be driven out of the church, or repelled from entering it, by the dazzling brightness of the truth of God, but in no other way can she be rid of them. The more practical knowledge one has of the subject, the more readily will he admit, that it is chiefly by the presence of such unworthy members that the church is corrupted and disgraced. There is no occasion to wonder that when, in the parable of the tares of the field, the servants said to the householder, "Wilt thou that we go and gather them up?" He answered, "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." The attempt to put such sinners out of the church by discipline would lead to contentions and litigations and bitterness, which would be eminently hurtful and dangerous to the moral purity of all its members.

The discipline which our Lord established in the church is primarily and chiefly reformatory in its character; and therefore in the very nature of the case not a judicial process. Who does not know that the object of a judicial process is the punishment of the guilty, not his reformation? The aim of Christ's discipline is identical with that of his own coming, to save that which was lost. I must here beg the reader to refer again to the directions given by our Lord, how one is to proceed when a brother trespasses against him.¹ It is also important to call attention to the connection in which these directions are given, for such a comparison sets the spirit of the whole passage in a very clear light. Jesus had just declared that "the Son of man is come to save that which was lost," and had most forcibly illustrated that saying by the parable of the lost sheep, implying that that parable truly represents the whole aim of his earthly mission. He immediately adds, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." He then proceeds to instruct all individual disciples what they are to do, to save from perishing the wrongdoing and injurious among their brethren, in those very words which have so generally been regarded as the formula of judicial church discipline. It is clear from the connection in which the words stand, that they are an application of the principle that "the Son of man came to save that which was lost"; that the aim of the whole proceeding is identical with that of the man, having an hundred sheep, going into the wilderness to seek one which had gone astray. The whole object was to recover and restore that which was lost.

The lesson which we are taught from the whole pas-

¹ Matt. xviii : 15-20. See Chap. IV., Part I.

sage is, that every individual disciple is to exert himself personally to reclaim his brethren when they fall into sin, especially in a case in which he is himself injured by the sin ; that he is to seek and is entitled to receive the co-operation of his brethren in such an effort ; and that when he cannot succeed by his own efforts, and the co-operation of a few of his brethren, he is to invoke the aid of the whole church. It does not mean that he is to bring a formal accusation, "to table charges," as it is commonly called, but that he shall state the case, and that the one or two who have co-operated with him shall give their view of the matter. The supposed offender would also have opportunity to represent the matter as he sees it. The obvious duty of the church would then be, in such ways as should seem best, to persuade either of the parties who should seem to have done wrong to repent and make restitution, and thus restore harmony with righteousness. There is no intimation, that the church is to hold a judicial investigation, to hear witnesses, and thus to judge, condemn and punish ; but to exert its influence to reclaim and restore one who seems to be in error. If in this way an erring brother cannot be restored, the individual trespassed against is released from further responsibility. He has done all he could to bring back the sheep that was lost. That which was lost remains lost, — a heathen man and a publican.

These words are in perfect harmony with the spirit in which every disciple of Christ is to regard and treat every other. Christianity is a consistent whole ; one aim pervades and characterizes it all, — the coming of the Messiah, the founding of the kingdom of heaven, and the conduct of every disciple toward every other. All have righteousness as the end, and the word of God, the persuasive power of the gospel, as the means

by which that end is to be attained. Cases are likely to arise of sins so flagrant and open offenders so evidently incorrigible, that the church owes it to the individual sinner to express its disapprobation of his character by a solemn act of exclusion from the society, "For the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Even in these cases, primary regard is to be had to the salvation of the lost.

It is a sufficient commendation of this conception of church discipline, that it is scriptural, and in harmony with the spirit of the whole Christian institution. But it is a strong additional consideration in its favor, that in a multitude of cases it is likely to prove effectual. If undertaken in the spirit of the gospel, it will be successful in reclaiming multitudes who, by the process of church litigation, would either retain their standing in the church unreclaimed, or be driven from it in bitterness and hopeless alienation. It will unite members of the church in the closest ties of mutual confidence and affection; for there is no other bond of attachment which binds human beings so strongly together, as that which is produced by the consciousness of having been mutual helpers in resisting temptations to evil, in cultivating the virtues of a truly Christian character, and in common efforts for the promotion of righteousness in the world. To introduce into that discipline the judicial element, and invest the church in its corporate capacity with the function of judging, condemning and punishing, always tends to rupture these strong and precious bonds of moral affection, and to alienate from each other those who ought to be brethren beloved.

It may seem to some an objection to this view of church discipline, that cases would undoubtedly come before the church in which it would be impossible to

determine whether individuals were really guilty of sins laid to their charge or not. How, it may be asked, is the church to proceed in such cases? I answer, that it is to such cases that a truly reformatory church discipline is peculiarly adapted. The church is to refer that which she does not know to the judgment of God, and deal only with what she does know. She is to apply the reforming power of the gospel to such symptoms of moral disease as are actually presented, and endeavor to restore both parties to moral health and soundness. Let her appoint some of her wisest and most devout members to confer with the individuals complaining and complained of, in the spirit of Christ, and to cultivate in them that truly penitent spirit which will lead the guilty to confession of their sins, and the injured to the forgiveness of injuries. By this process the church will be far more likely to arrive at a knowledge of the whole truth than by any judicial investigation; and she will become acquainted with it to save the guilty and not to condemn him. Experience demonstrates, that an ecclesiastical court is an exceedingly imperfect instrument for the detection of guilt, or the vindication of injured innocence. In a country of religious liberty, an ecclesiastical court is in the nature of the case destitute of the means of conducting a judicial investigation successfully. It cannot compel¹ witnesses to appear and bear testimony, and without that

¹ In some of the States the law does confer on ecclesiastical tribunals the power to compel witnesses to attend and to testify. But it seems to me that in using such a power, the church contracts an alliance with the State which is exceedingly at variance with the aim and true position of Christianity in the world. It is a remnant of that alliance of the civil and ecclesiastical, which our fathers unfortunately did not leave behind when they embarked for the New World.

power a judicial proceeding is little better than a farce, and often exposes the church to contempt. We have recent experiences on this subject which ought to satisfy all men. If Jesus Christ intended the church should act as a judicial body, he would have clothed it with the powers without which that function cannot be performed. In a free country an ecclesiastical court is an ecclesiastical absurdity. Let the church then cease to lay claim to a function which it is impossible she should ever perform, and content herself with applying those moral forces which the Master has committed to her to the facts that are within her reach. Let her admit that her function is to reform and save the guilty, and not to detect, condemn and punish crime.

Bad as the world is, it is not impossible to maintain in it such a church discipline as this. By its perfect harmony with the spirit of the gospel, it will secure the approbation and cordial support of all devout men, and win for itself their warmest affection. It will shock the tastes and moral sentiments of no right-minded person, but will on the contrary secure to the church the homage and reverence of mankind. Scarcely anything has done so much to deprive the church of her proper influence in the world, as a litigious and punitive discipline. Courts of justice may be well adapted to the purpose of detecting and punishing crime, but I know not that jurists have ever claimed that they have any special fitness to promote the reformation of the guilty. They were instituted for the former and not for the latter. Ecclesiastical courts are unfitted to the ends for which the gospel exists in the world, and were therefore never instituted by the Founder of the kingdom of heaven.

Sect as it is at present constituted would be a great hindrance to this discipline. The rivalries of one sect

with another would be a great obstacle in the way of an attempt in any church to make faithful application of all the reformatory powers of the gospel to its individual members. Those who in such a church were living in the practice of any sin would be under a constant temptation to escape from the application of those reformatory forces to themselves, by seeking a church connection in which there would be more toleration of sin. But the universal abandonment of judicial discipline would put an end to sect itself. Whenever the church will consent to commit all judgment and all government to God, and trust alone in the word of the Lord for the formation and perfection of individual character and the edification, enlargement and purity of the church, sect itself will die, and be known only among the sorrowful memories of the past. Government, the usurpation of the prerogative of God is the one corruption of the church from which sect originates, and when that is abandoned, sect will perish because its cause has ceased to exist. The unity of the Holy Catholic Church will be restored, when we resign its government to its invisible Head, and only seek to co-operate with him by putting forth some portion of that moral power by which alone he governs.

The question is very naturally suggested, whether the discipline of the church has anything to do with the maintenance of sound doctrine. Undoubtedly it has. It applies to Christian doctrine just as to every other portion of Christian life. Each individual disciple is under the same obligation to promote his brother's soundness in faith as in conduct, and the methods to be pursued are the same in both cases. Individual intercourse, the co-operation of brethren sound in faith, and when necessary the aid of the church itself, are the instruments to be employed. In the use of them, the

question at issue is not whether my brother precisely agrees with me in all matters of religious opinion, but whether he firmly stands by the faith of Jesus the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Doubtless if, as the result of such a fraternal comparison of views, it becomes apparent that there is an irreconcilable conflict of opinion in respect to the essential nature of Christianity, the holders of the two opinions will be divided asunder. How can two walk together except they be agreed? They can no longer continue to be members of one society, the sole organic principle of which is a common faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world. There is no occasion however to be in the least disquieted at this result. If any one has supposed that in all this discussion I have been trying to find out a method by which those who believe in Christ and those who deny him can be harmoniously comprehended in the same Christian body, they have greatly misunderstood my aim. It is the division of Christian disciples into sects which is deplored and is to be remedied, not the separation of those who deny Christ from those who believe in him. This division will always be both desirable and inevitable, as long as there are some who do and some who do not believe.

Such a constitution of the church as is advocated in these pages will not only have no tendency to hinder, but it will greatly facilitate the separation of believers from unbelievers. It has been maintained that the one organic principle of the church everywhere is faith in Jesus Christ as crucified for the sins of the world and risen again. Believers in that Christ are drawn to the church, while unbelievers are repelled from it. Under our present sect system, this one legitimate organic principle of the church is overlaid and often quite concealed from view, by innumerable unimportant questions

of form and ceremony and government, which have no real relevancy to the subject, and only tend to divert attention from the true issue. Many a man is in this or that church, because he likes its form of worship, or its government, or its architecture, or its music, or the language and diction of its pastor, when he would never have been drawn to it by a faith in common with its members in Jesus Christ. The doctrines advocated in this book tend directly to render the open separation between believers and unbelievers more easy, more apparent and more inevitable.

No intelligent Protestant needs at this time to be informed, that the different Christian sects known as "evangelical" are not to any considerable extent divided by theological lines. Their recognized formularies of doctrine, which have come down to them almost unchanged from the times of the reformers, may be more or less at variance. But the doctrines of their pulpits, their praying circles and their ordinary Christian life are identical. He has not been a successful observer who does not know, that the latter of these expressions of doctrinal belief is not necessarily coincident with the former. In every Protestant church in christendom, the ordinary and practical expression of religious thought, like every other form of living language, is undergoing constant changes, while the prescribed formulæ remain unchanged from century to century. You will often find the former no more resembling the latter than the English of the present resembles that of Spenser's "Faerie Queene." Many of us may regret this discrepancy, but none of us can hinder it, even in the language in which we express our own practical theology. It was not long ago, that a gentleman whose reputation as an unbeliever is at least national, in the excitement of debate took from

his pocket a copy of the New England Primer, to prove that the Orthodox of the present time believe in the torment of the wicked by literal fire. He would have been just as wise if he had quoted Spenser and Chaucer as authorities for the English of the present.

The truth is undeniable that, though the formal creeds of the churches differ, the practical expressions of religious faith in their pulpits and their common life are to a great extent identical. You may find in the same village a half-dozen sects with separate organizations, strenuously maintained, and yet, whatever their formal creeds may be, the same preachers of the gospel of Christ may find easy access to all their pulpits, and the same evangelic message is equally acceptable in them all. The inference is unavoidable, that they are not kept in their separation by theological differences, but by rival governments. There are at the present time no theological obstacles which would seriously obstruct the union of the great body of Christian people who are regarded as evangelical in faith, in churches which should know no bond of union but a common belief in our Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world.

CHAPTER VI.

OTHER OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

No one who considers the vastness and complication of the ecclesiastical systems of the present would for a moment expect, that the doctrines advocated in this work can make their way in christendom, without encountering great and protracted resistance. Even if they were universally admitted to be true, their influence would not be sudden and violently revolutionary, but gradual and quiet. But they will not be readily accepted. Their tendency to undermine all those systems of ecclesiastical organization which assume the power of the keys will be readily perceived by all thoughtful men, and will create a great reluctance to receive them. While there is certainly much in the ecclesiastical structures of christendom which is of disastrous tendency, those structures are not maintained and defended for the most part by bad men with evil intentions, but by good men with good intentions, men who devoutly believe that the ecclesiastical systems which they support are the necessary means of conserving and propagating truth and righteousness in the world, and that the destruction of them would be most disastrous to the interests of true religion. The very fact that the doctrines advocated in this work do confessedly tend to subvert those ecclesiastical systems will seem a fatal objection to the acceptance of these

doctrines. Many will regard them as subversive of systems which are necessary to the maintenance and propagation of Christianity, and therefore subversive of Christianity itself, and the resistance offered to them will be honest and devout. Such objections are worthy of the most respectful consideration.

To the adherents of the papal church all this will seem not only indirectly but directly subversive of religion itself. Take away from the honest adherent of the papal church everything which depends for its continued existence on the power of the keys, and you leave him little which he reverences or values. You leave him no universal and infallible church authority, no priesthood to administer valid sacraments and thereby to render the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross available for the salvation of individual believers, no absolution, no forgiveness of sins, no admission into the kingdom of heaven. All these blessings seem to him to come along the line of a priestly succession, that holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and has the exclusive power to dispense its blessings to the children of men. It might be still true, that Christ died for the sins of the world, but the doctrines of this book are subversive of that organized church and that priestly succession which, according to his belief, furnish the only channel along which the blessings purchased by his death can flow to mortals. This is the fundamental doctrine of organized Catholicity. Men who conscientiously adhere to this system will defend the doctrine of St. Peter's keys as the very essence of Christianity. The only question between us and them is whether this doctrine is true or false. To answer therefore objections coming from this source would be to reiterate the whole argument of the previous chapters. If that argument is sound, organic Catholicity is a delusion and a

chimera, and every attempt to enforce it in practice is an ecclesiastical usurpation. No further attention need therefore be given to objections from this quarter.

In the minds of Protestants, objections present themselves under a different aspect. That person can hardly be said to be a Protestant who does not sharply distinguish between the gospel and church polity, and who does not discern, that the gospel may exist in its purity under widely differing forms of polity. It may almost be said to be an article in the common Protestant faith, that the gospel of Christ immeasurably transcends in importance any and all questions of mere ecclesiastical order. If there are any persons who are classified as Protestants, who do not heartily accept this article of faith, it may well be suspected that a mistake in classification has been made, and it is not improbable that sooner or later they will discover the mistake and make haste to correct it. It is not improbable, that in the Anglican churches, as they now exist in different parts of the world, many persons are to be found, and some of them of high culture and moral worth, who are thus wrongly classified, and many of them are becoming painfully conscious of their false position. They do believe in a mediating priesthood as the only channel of the grace of God to men. They are sacramentarians. They do believe that the blessings of salvation come to men only through Christian rites duly administered, and that such an administration implies a priestly succession holding the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and they do accept in greater or less degree that ritualistic worship which is the logical development of these principles. Their practical Christianity consists essentially of a mediating priesthood, forming the only channel of communication between a crucified Saviour and the men for whom he died. It matters little that they do

not accept the supremacy of the pope. For all the purposes of the present argument they are out of place among Protestants.

There is however a considerable portion of the membership, and even of the clergy of the Anglican churches, who are truly Protestants in faith and feeling. They do not by any means accept those doctrines of the church and the priesthood which have been enumerated above. They wish to retain the organic structure of the Anglican church for the sake of its prescribed and orderly form of worship, its venerable liturgy and its conservative tendencies. Such persons—and among them are found many of the noblest spirits of this century—will feel great reluctance to accepting that view of the church which is advocated in these pages. They will certainly perceive the tendency of those doctrines to dissolve the organic superstructure of Anglicanism. They will ask with an honest solicitude which is worthy of our respect, Can that superstructure be maintained, when the power of the keys shall have been thoroughly discarded and eliminated from men's minds ; when it is admitted that baptism and the Lord's Supper require no priestly intervention to administer them, that the laying on of the hands of the bishop conveys neither power nor authority so to administer these rites as to render them acceptable to God and edifying to the people, and that the only authority of any church officer of any grade is moral and spiritual ?

To such an inquiry it is reasonable to reply, that in such an altered condition of men's opinions, every portion of that system will, in the progress of events, be subjected to the enlightened discretion of a Christian people. The whole faith and life of the church will feel the searching influence of the teachings, the example and the spirit of the divine Master. It cannot

escape the application of "the refiner's fire and the fuller's soap." The dross will be removed, the pure gold only will remain. Are not these devout and enlightened men willing to submit to such a process? On reflection, will they not court such a process to be fearlessly applied to their whole system? There are certain considerations which are certainly exceedingly worthy the attention of that portion of the Anglican churches referred to.

Such men cannot be satisfied with the wide separation which exists between themselves and other Protestant churches. The candor, the fraternal spirit, the genuine catholicity of heart of such men as Whately and Alford and G. A. Jacob and the Tyngs give us the assurance, that these men cannot wish to disown the ministerial labors and discredit the ministerial standing of all ministers of Christ in other ecclesiastical connections, to debar them from their pulpits, and to withhold from them all acts of ministerial courtesy. It is well worth the while of such men to inquire, how it is that they have been thrown into this condition of unnatural and unchristian isolation from their brethren. If they prosecute this inquiry with any degree of diligence, they will certainly not be long in discovering, that the source of that isolation is found only in those assumptions of clerical power, which we have shown to have no foundation in the authority of the Head of the church. Dean Alford certainly knew well, that the Archbishop of Canterbury is, in the light of the New Testament, no more truly a minister of the church of Christ, and could no more confer ghostly powers by the laying on of his hands, than Mr. Spurgeon. This wide gulf was created and is perpetuated only by the assumption that a priesthood in three orders is essential to the constitution of the Christian church and the Christian

ministry, and that the external rites of Christianity can only be acceptably observed under the ministration of a clergy that has received the gift of ministering in them by the laying on of the bishop's hands. If this doctrine is given in Scripture as an article of our Christian faith, then the good men of whom we are speaking are right in adhering to it in practice under whatever difficulties; and the fault of this grievous separation lies only with those who stand aloof from the church as prelatically constituted. But if the authority of Jesus Christ and his apostles cannot be pleaded in support of this doctrine, then the fault of this grievous schism in the church of God must rest with those who adhere to it in practice.

Such men ought also to consider, that these high priestly assumptions have borne bitter fruits in the past history of christendom. Assume a priestly hierarchy as a fundamental principle of the church of Christ, and you have created a logical tendency toward ritualism in worship and spiritual despotism in government, which has always in the history of the past proved almost irresistible. This experiment has been so long and so often tried, that we ought to be thoroughly convinced that what always has been always will be. It was this logical tendency which converted the church of the ante-Nicene age into the church of the Middle Ages. It is the same logical tendency which is constantly manifesting itself in all the Anglican churches, and with which the enlightened men in those churches who hold a true spiritual faith, are engaged in perpetual conflict. If the organic principles of that church remain unquestioned and unchanged, that conflict will be as lasting as the church of God. It will pass on as it has done from the fathers to the children, and the children's children, through uncounted generations. It is a hope-

less conflict with the organic principles of the system itself. Men may accept those organic principles as Archbishop Whately and Dr. G. A. Jacob have done, only as a matter of expediency and for the sake of what seems to them order; but they will no less produce their own proper logical results. The assumptions on which we build the church of Christ will always be accepted by the great mass of its members as sacred and divine. What was regarded by the father and perhaps founder as merely expedient and orderly, will be regarded by his children and his children's children as holy and of divine appointment.

It must not therefore be expected that the mighty chasm which separates prelatical from unprelatical Protestantism can ever be filled up or bridged over, by persuading the adherents of the latter to accept the theory of Anglicanism, as a mere matter of convenience and order. If we consent to build the church as though these priestly assumptions were true and of God, we shall doom ourselves and our children after us to eat the bitter and poisonous fruits which those assumptions have borne for fifteen centuries, and are bearing still before our eyes. There is but one way in which anti-prelatical Protestants can ever be induced to accept prelacy in any of its forms, and that is by convincing us that Jesus Christ and his apostles instituted and left in the church a prelatical priesthood. The Christian men who occupy positions on opposite sides of this line must desire and pray that this great schism may be healed. It is a scandal in the eyes of the world, it must be offensive to God. It should be understood by them all that it can be healed either by demonstrating to the satisfaction of all good men, that Jesus Christ instituted a prelatical priesthood, or else by universal consent to abandon what seems to me the chimera

of organic catholicity, and to accept the spiritual catholicity of him who said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Without the slightest hesitation, I hold and maintain, that every man on both sides of the line is sacredly bound to accept the issue thus sharply put. Those who admit that a perpetual priestly hierarchy instituted by Christ himself is only a chimera, have no right to adhere to Anglicanism, or any form of prelacy as a matter of convenience and order. If a prelatical priesthood is not a divine institution, it is neither convenient nor orderly, but an arrogant assumption, which will create a deplorable schism in the church of God, just so long as any good men are found to adhere to it. I yield to no man in fervent love of the catholicity of the church of Christ. For the sake of promoting it I will yield anything but my convictions of truth and righteousness. These no man has any right to yield; and the catholicity of the church of Christ never can be realized, except by the universal consent of all good men to build only on the everlasting foundation of the truth as it is in Jesus.

The adherents of the Anglican churches regard with reverence and affection the venerable, stately and somewhat æsthetic forms of worship which Anglicanism maintains. Perhaps it is not improper to suggest in this place, that the feelings with which those forms are regarded may be excessive and even morbid. It certainly is not accordant with the spirit of Christianity to attach importance to the language or to any of the external forms and modes in which worship is expressed, or to any of the circumstances which attend it. It is freely admitted that the worship of the spirit is always acceptable to God under whatever forms presented. Doubtless he that worships God in spirit and in truth will be accepted of him, though he presents the offering

of his heart amid the pomp and stately splendor of the cathedral, as truly as he who worships amid the humblest and most unpoetic surroundings. And yet the truth is undeniable, that a system which tends to lay the emphasis of worship on the taste, the beauty, the æsthetic perfection of the form and the circumstances is not a good system ; and the fact that those who adopt any system of worship are apt to attach a great deal of importance to these external circumstances should awaken our suspicion that all is not right. It suggests the fear, that the system tends to superstition rather than to spiritual worship. The sacred vestments of the clergy may produce a very agreeable impression on the taste and the imagination of those who are accustomed to them ; and yet it may be doubtful whether a constitution of public worship, which constantly cultivates a reverence for the priestly garments which the ministers of religion wear, is harmonious in spirit with the religion of the New Testament. The reaction of the fathers of Puritanism against priestly forms, and especially against clerical vestments, may have been excessive, but it surely was not wholly without reason. There was just ground for apprehension, that in long ages, certainly much more characterized by attachment to the form than to the spirit of worship, a reverence had grown up for established forms and rites and priestly garments, which overshadowed and concealed from view that worship of the spirit, which it is the object of the Christian religion to cultivate. That reverence for the external forms of religion, which confessedly prevails in the Anglican churches, may be an argument for and not an objection against such a reconstruction as I advocate. Would it not be wiser and safer to withdraw the hand of ecclesiastical authority altogether from matters of this sort, and leave

them to the sound discretion of Christian people under the guiding influence of the word and spirit of God?

Certainly Jesus Christ did not prescribe the external forms in which worship should be paid, and the form and color and texture of the garments which should be worn by those who lead the devotions of his people. Can it then be expedient for us to attempt to regulate by law, or by immemorial custom having all the force of law, the innumerable details of our social religious life, which the Head and Founder of the church chose to leave to the good sense and free choice of his followers in all places and all times? Can we entertain any reasonable hope that the church of Christ will ever have its true development, and obtain its true place in the world, till all men and all religious associations, and especially all officials of the church, shall cease from such officious intermeddling?

Another class of objections will come from those who are sincerely and devoutly attached to the polity and worship of Presbyterianism. They believe that the Christian religion can only exert its proper influence on the world, through the doctrines of Christ perpetually conserved in the church, and inculcated by it. No class of Christian men have ever held this belief with more commendable tenacity and earnestness, and for their fidelity in this regard they deserve the thanks of all true disciples of Christ. They are also well aware of those tendencies to swerve from the doctrine of Christ, and to substitute for it the commandments of men, which have been constantly active in every age of Christian history. They are strongly attached to the Presbyterian polity because they believe it to be eminently fitted to resist these encroachments of error, and to conserve evangelic truth. Many of them even regard the safeguards with which Presbyterianism surrounds

and protects evangelic faith as quite essential to its perpetuity in the world, and are very seriously apprehensive, that if these ecclesiastical barriers were broken down, all the landmarks of "orthodoxy" would be swept away, and that truth and falsehood would be mingled together in undistinguishable confusion. Such men will regard the doctrines of this book with distrust and apprehension, lest if generally received they would tend to disintegrate this ecclesiastical system, and remove the barriers which separate Presbyterians from the rest of the Christian world.

They may be right in this apprehension, as they certainly are in their estimate of the importance of conserving Christian truth. It may be necessary to view that system a little in detail, for the purpose of inquiring whether the power of the keys is indispensable to its compactness and permanency. One might easily become convinced by a little reflection, that one leading function of a Presbyterian church session is the official guardianship of the Lord's Supper; and that, as all the acts of the session are subject to the revision of the higher judicatories, this function pervades the entire system. It is freely admitted that an eldership (presbytery) existed in some of the churches of apostolic times, and probably in all, but with very different functions from those of the present Presbyterian eldership, or at least without the special function above described. It was not a judicial body, an ecclesiastical court, but a body of men chosen on account of their experience, wisdom and purity of life, and intrusted with the spiritual oversight of the whole brotherhood. Such an eldership might be maintained with great advantage in every church, though entirely divested of the power of the keys. But such a church session could not be an integral portion of the Presbyterian ecclesiastical sys-

tem as at present constituted. Its acts could not form a basis of appeal to the higher church courts. They could have no jurisdiction over it. Jurisdiction and the right of appeal imply judicial decision, trial, conviction and a sentence. The acts of such an eldership would be purely moral, and could no more be a ground of appeal to a higher court than a father's loving admonition to his children could be brought under the jurisdiction of a civil court.

Presbyterianism is essentially an association of clergymen for the government of the church. There is indeed a large and very influential and useful popular element in it. In the United States at least, no man can become a pastor without the election of a particular congregation, and no man can become an elder without the appointment of the church in which he is to exercise the office. But no man can have any share in the government of the Presbyterian Church, who has not first been made a clergyman by ordination. It is true that the Presbyterian Church earnestly rejects all priesthood, but the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet in one respect its clergy exercise a priestly function. No one can draw near to God in the observance of the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper without the intervention of the clergy. The very idea of a clergy implies mediation, and mediation is essentially priestly. If then you remove from the whole church of Christ the clerical idea and function, or in other words, if you bring back the church to the original conception of apostolic times, you destroy the only materials out of which such an ecclesiastical edifice as the Presbyterian Church in the United States or the Free Church of Scotland can be built. I cannot disguise this view of the doctrine I am advocating from my own mind, nor do I wish to disguise it from the mind of the reader. Church organiza-

tion has been changed from what it was in apostolic hands to what it is in the nineteenth century by the logical influence of an assumption which was unknown to the primitive church; and if we renounce that assumption and eliminate it from all our church organizations, we shall bring back the church itself to its primitive constitution. Without the renunciation of that assumption, the recovery of the original constitution of the church is logically impossible.

A clear perception of this logical result will create in many minds grave apprehensions, lest the church principles which I advocate would remove valuable barriers, by which Christian truth is hedged around and powerfully guarded against the incursions of error. It becomes necessary therefore to inquire what these barriers are, and whether they are really valuable for the defence of the truth as it is in Jesus. In conducting this inquiry, I shall not for one moment forget that I am handling a subject of grave importance. No man can over-estimate its importance. They who forsake evangelic truth forsake Christ, and lose their hold of the only instrument by which he purposed to save a lost world. Nor shall I forget, that I am dealing with earnest, honest men, whose attachment to Christian truth is devout and sincere, and who adhere to the system which they love, because it is their abiding conviction, that it is eminently valuable in guarding the church against the incursions of error.

The protection which Presbyterianism seems to furnish against the inroads of false doctrine is twofold. The churches are bound by the constitution to call no one to the pastorate whose soundness in the faith has not been already vouched for by the presbytery, and to induct no one into the pastoral office except by the act of the presbytery. Again the presbytery and all

the higher judicatories of the church are constitutionally bound to lay hands in ordination on no one, except on condition of his solemnly declaring his acceptance and adoption of the recognized standards of the church. Is then the first of these provisions helpful to the preservation of doctrinal soundness? If so it is strange indeed that we find no trace of such an institution in the primitive church. It may perhaps be said, that during their lifetime the apostles regulated this matter by their own personal influence. Considering the vast area over which Christianity had spread itself in the lifetime of the apostles, it must have been but a feeble supervision which twelve men could have exercised over all the churches. The apostles moreover knew well that, like other men, they must soon pass away, and they have left behind the proof that they were quite aware that perilous times were near at hand. If then it had been possible to create an effectual or useful barrier against the incursions of error, by placing the government of all the churches in the hands of such a clerical association as is created by the constitution of the Presbyterian Church, why did not the apostles guard against the imminent perils of the near future, by placing the selection of church officers under such a clerical supervision?

This question shuts us up to a single alternative. We must either renounce our confidence in the expediency and wisdom of such arrangements, or we must deny that the apostles were divinely endowed with wisdom to found and constitute the church, and assume that they were no more inspired in respect to the organization of the church than other men. According to this view of the case, the constitution of the church is, like all human institutions, a proper subject for experiment, and likely to be successively improved age after

age as the result of experience. Very few devout believers in the supernatural origin of the Christian religion and church are fully prepared to subscribe to this doctrine. And yet the whole sect system of our times really assumes it, and builds upon it as its fundamental principle. It is only another form of the principle already examined, that no system of church polity is found in the New Testament. If this is so, we are wasting our time in seeking a remedy for the evils and confusions of sect. On this supposition, the Founder of Christianity himself is responsible for these evils and confusions.

And yet in another view of the case, we are not hopeless of a remedy, even on the assumption that the apostles were not divinely endowed with wisdom to constitute the church. Jesus Christ is still the one only Founder of Christianity and the church, and neither the apostles nor any Christian people in any age can have a right so to found the church, as to contravene the clearly expressed fundamental principles of his kingdom. It has been abundantly shown that the power of the keys does contravene those principles, and consequently no company of believers, great or small, can have a right to construct a church on that basis. It has already been proved that, without the power of the keys, such a clerical guardianship of doctrinal soundness as is provided by the Presbyterian Church cannot be maintained. You cannot have a government without a penalty. If you deny to the church the right to debar its members from the privilege of participating in the Lord's Supper, you deprive it of all power of inflicting a penalty. You render judicial trial, conviction, condemnation, appeal, impossible. You take away the whole foundation upon which a system of church courts can rest, and destroy the possi-

bility of erecting and maintaining any of those great compact ecclesiastical systems which divide modern christendom. You bring back the church to the primitive model. One may say then that the clerical supervision of the faith of the church provided by Presbyterianism is very wise and useful, and would have been adopted by the apostles if they had only been wise enough to invent it ; but they can have no right, for the sake of maintaining and perpetuating that supervision, to assume a control and guardianship of a rite which the Head of the church gave to be freely enjoyed by the whole multitude of the disciples, wherever two or three are gathered together in his name. It is no vindication of such a usurpation to say, that it is necessary to the maintenance of an arrangement of our own invention, which we may happen to think wise and useful. In any case the church can have no authority which was not conferred on it by its Founder.

But after all, is it self-evident, or has it been proved, that the ecclesiastical arrangements of Presbyterianism are truly conservative of Christian doctrine? Does the history of the church show that clerical control is more conservative of doctrinal soundness than the freedom of the local church to select its own officers and religious teachers without any such clerical supervision? It has been shown in the progress of this work, that the early church after the death of the apostles did very rapidly depart from primitive simplicity and purity of faith and worship. It is remarkable, and as obvious as remarkable, that among the earliest symptoms of this departure, we everywhere find the increase of official supervision, the origin and growth of clerical power, and the diminished influence of the brotherhood in the arrangements of the church. Clerical usurpation was both the sign and the cause of the progress of corrup-

tion. The same thing has been true in subsequent ages. False doctrine has found its way into the churches far more through the clergy than through the brotherhood. The church never has been and never can be safe, except in so far as the clergy are responsible to a devout brotherhood, having free access to the divine word, and the free choice of their own religious teachers. Any deviation from such a constitution of the church has always been dangerous to its soundness in the faith. From the Reformation to the present time, those churches that have been freest in their constitution and most directly subject to the control of the brotherhood, have held most tenaciously to the evangelic faith. Want of space forbids an examination of this subject in detail. Let the religious history of Germany, of Geneva, of England, Scotland, and the United States, of France, and the Low Countries, be examined in reference to this subject, and the result will be found to be the same.

Perhaps it will still be said that a constitution of the church which renders it impossible for any one to obtain ordination either as a minister or an elder, without a solemn declaration of adhesion to such orthodox standards as those of the Presbyterian Church, must be conservative of doctrinal soundness. This assertion cannot be accepted without proof. No one is prepared to deny the doctrinal soundness of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church. Has the necessity of subscribing to those Articles insured the doctrinal soundness of her clergy? Is there one error in doctrine, lying anywhere between the extremes of the worst superstitions of the papal church on the one hand, and the baldest rationalism on the other, which does not find believers and advocates among the clergy of the Church of England? It is impossible so to constitute the

church that the position of a religious teacher will not present attractions to worldly ambition. The eloquent pulpit orator will draw from his admiring hearers tempting pecuniary rewards, and win a position of influence and fame. Such attractions will be irresistible to the unscrupulous and unprincipled, and for the sake of obtaining such prizes, they will subscribe to any statement of doctrine you can propose to them. The necessity of subscription will prove a snare to good men. A certain latitude of interpretation must be allowed. In the attempt to reduce Christianity to a precise and definite form of statement in all its details, not only of doctrine but of doctrinal speculation and systemization, no one man's language can exactly express the thought of another. No form of statement can exactly coincide with the individual opinions of all the men composing such a body as the Westminster Assembly. It will express nobody's belief exactly. The necessity of granting some latitude becomes an irresistible plea for more, until in the course of time it is considered perfectly right and proper for men holding widely different religious systems, to subscribe to the same standards. The plea is, that men subscribe only for "substance of doctrine"; but how much of the substance each one embraces in his subscription, we have no means of determining.

It has long seemed to me, that such loose subscription to articles of faith is on the one hand inevitable, if we require any subscription at all, and on the other immoral and demoralizing. I have never been able to believe, in view of the facts which have been before my eyes, that it is conservative either of soundness in the faith or purity of morals. It was only two or three years ago, that the attention of the whole American public was attracted by an ecclesiastical trial, in which

a man of very high reputation as a pulpit orator was very earnestly charged before his presbytery with heresy. He allowed himself to be arraigned, and pleaded, "Not guilty," and was placed on trial before an ecclesiastical court. He was earnestly defended by men of very high reputation in the Presbyterian Church, of undoubted doctrinal soundness, and was acquitted by the judgment of the court. And yet the doctrinal teaching of the accused, as heard from Sabbath to Sabbath by large and admiring audiences, and as it appeared in numerous published discourses, was about as far removed as can well be imagined from the "system of doctrine" taught in the standards of the Presbyterian Church. I heard him myself. I was shocked, my soul was sick at the terrible contrast between the doctrines which he had solemnly professed to believe, and those which he publicly preached. To call the career of Prof. David Swing as a Presbyterian minister a ridiculous farce, is to speak far too lightly of it. I could not help regarding it as a sort of mockery. Yet I affirm that just such results must always be expected sooner or later to come from the attempt to conserve doctrinal soundness, by such a system of clerical supervision as that of Presbyterianism.

The difficulties which are encountered in requiring subscription to articles of faith as a condition of holding responsible public positions are not anything new, but have long been known and acknowledged by thoughtful men. There is positive historic evidence that some men¹ who were conspicuous in framing the

¹ On page 775, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. XXX., will be found an extract from a letter of Dr. Anthony Tuckney to Dr. Benjamin Whichcote, from which I copy the following language relating to Dr. Tuckney's action as a member of the Westminster Assembly: "For matter of imposing upon, I am not guilty. In the Assembly

Westminster Confession of Faith did not desire that subscription to it should be required. It was regarded only as a declaration of the faith of the churches, and not as a test of the orthodoxy of each individual candidate for the ministry. The formularies of doctrine of the Congregational churches have always been understood in the same way. Even the Confessions of Faith of particular churches were not, in the early history of Congregationalism in this country, used to test the doctrinal soundness of individuals. Candidates for admission to the church were expected to state their views of doctrine in their own language, and according to the age and experience and acquirements of each. The application of the same form of words as a measure of the faith of all candidates for admission to the church, old or young, learned or ignorant, is of comparatively recent origin, and goes along with a great many other facts to show that change is not always improvement.

The difficulties connected with subscription are inherent in the very nature of the case, and can never be removed. Every true Protestant admits, that the Scriptures are the only authoritative standard of faith, and that no formulary of doctrine can have any binding force at all, any further than it agrees with the Scriptures. No man, who is well enough informed on the subject to be entitled to have any opinion at all, will for a moment hesitate to admit, that while the Scriptures themselves are changeless, our knowledge of them is

I gave my vote with others that the confession of faith, put out by authority, should not be required to be either sworn or subscribed to (we having been burned in the hand in that kind before), but so as not to be publicly preached or written against." This extract is taken from Prof. Park's very interesting analysis of Whichcote's Aphorisms, in the April and October numbers of the volume above referred to.

progressive. He who does not know that the scholarship of the last two centuries has thrown a great deal of light upon the interpretation of the Scriptures, knows nothing at all about the matter. If then our formularies of doctrine are of authority only so far as they agree with the Scriptures, and our knowledge of the Scriptures is progressive, then the creeds of the seventeenth century cannot reasonably be expected accurately to express the religious thought of the nineteenth; and it must be preposterous to attempt to measure the orthodoxy of the nineteenth century by the doctrinal formularies of the seventeenth. No creed can accurately measure the faith of its own age. Much less can it truly represent the faith of subsequent ages of intense mental activity, and devout and earnest scholarship. If the church will make such attempts, she will always involve herself in serious difficulties in consequence of them.

If the church insists on employing a statement of Christian doctrine constructed in a former age, with however much wisdom and devoutness, as her permanent doctrinal standard in ages of profound and earnest scholarship, she will inevitably be involved in one of two difficulties. Either subscription will become loose, unscrupulous and latitudinarian, and the whole efficacy of her standards will be frittered away by unrestrained laxity of interpretation, and the standards themselves will become a dead letter; or else devout, earnest, honest men will turn their backs upon her, and refuse to wear the yoke which she insists on imposing. Either she will allow her standards to pass into neglect, and subscription to become an unmeaning form, or she will herself be neglected by the brightest minds and the noblest men who are trained under the influence of Christianity. The same form of words cannot remain

appropriately expressive of ever-changeful and progressive thought. Living thought always grows, and growing thought always requires living, growing language for its expression.

It may be asked, Why then, since the Bible is a collection of language, will it not become obsolete also? There is more than one reason why it will not. The first is a sufficient one. The Bible is a revelation from God. Its truths do not originate in a limited human mind, but in a divine, all-knowing mind. It is reasonable therefore to expect, that improvement in knowledge of the great religious themes with which the Bible deals, instead of making its language seem inappropriate and inexpressive, will give us a clearer appreciation of its appropriateness and expressiveness. This is not theory but fact, attested by the experience of millions. For example, the more we know of the profound truths which our Lord expressed in the beatitudes, the more shall we be convinced of the appropriateness and complete adequacy of his language to express them. The Scriptures are full of illustrations of the same truth. No man, no body of men can formulate a system of religious truth for all subsequent ages, without the same perfect knowledge of the subject which was possessed by him who has given a revelation of himself in the Scriptures.

Another reason why the Scriptures cannot become obsolete is, that they instruct us, not in the language of abstraction and generalization, but in the concrete forms of common life, of the affections and the imagination, which are far more available for the permanent expression of truth. Abstraction and generalization are limiting processes, and are only relative to an individual mind, or to a comparatively small number of minds, that view things under the same aspect. As soon as that aspect is in any degree changed, the language

becomes inappropriate and unmeaning. Progress in knowledge is very likely sooner or later to render it obsolete. The language of Scripture has to do with facts which can never change, and can therefore be accurately and permanently delineated. In communicating to us a great religious truth, it is not confined to a single abstraction or generalization, but sets it before the mind with all that variety of imagery which the imagination can furnish; and that imagery is drawn from the great, deep, permanent sources of human nature and human life. How barren are all those expressions of the divine attributes which are available to the creed-maker, as compared with the infinite variety with which those same attributes are represented under the innumerable concrete forms which the Scriptures employ! How hopeless the attempt to compress all the truth expressed in the latter into the narrow dimensions which are possible to the former! How reasonable to expect that as men devoutly study the Scriptures, and advance in the knowledge of them from age to age, the expressions of religious truth which have been formulated in past ages will become inadequate to the needs of the present time!

Perhaps in reply to all this it may be said, that if the church fails to fence herself around by some such impassable landmarks, there is no telling whither she will drift. Something must be fixed, settled. But, it is replied, if we receive the Scriptures as the word of God, containing a revelation of the truth which man needs to know to guide him in the way of salvation, something is fixed and settled, and no good reason can be given why we should not accept it, instead of erecting other landmarks of our own devising. Are we wiser than God? Can we erect landmarks of truth more wisely than the Author of divine revelation has done? It may be said,

men differ widely in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Do they differ more widely than the leading minds in the Presbyterian Church did, in the trial of Dr. Lyman Beecher, or Albert Barnes, or Prof. David Swing? In these last-mentioned cases, all parties admitted that the standards of the church were not authoritative, except so far as they agree with Scripture ; but if we recognize the Scriptures as the word of God, their authority is final. There can be no course of wisdom and propriety open to those who receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God, except to leave the way always open for a direct appeal to their authority. Experience shows that we cannot trust an infallible church, governed by an infallible pope ; for it has led men for ages into the most degrading superstitions and the most terrific despotisms. We cannot trust to any formulary of doctrine which one age has made to be imposed upon another ; for the makers of it knew not all things, and "more truth is perpetually breaking out of God's Holy Word, as precious as any which had before been made known." We can trust the word and spirit of God to guide the church of God over unknown seas to that blessed haven of purity and wisdom and beneficent power for which God has destined her. He who is not willing to trust the church to such a guiding hand has less faith in God and Christ and the Bible and the Spirit than he ought to have.

Another objection will come with great force to many minds certainly in this country, from quite another quarter. The Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States has a very peculiar origin and history. It originated from the almost apostolic labors of the Wesleys and Whitefield. It was a genuine revival of evangelic faith and labors, in the midst of the dead formality into which religion had sunk in England. As an organism

it has never laid any claims to a Scriptural origin. As an Episcopal organization it stands upon the same basis of argument as any other form of Episcopacy, that is, it can lay no claim whatever to apostolic authority. So far as I am acquainted with its literature, it has never set up any claim to such authority, but has relied altogether upon considerations of expediency and utility. In this respect it is very widely distinguished from the Anglican and papal churches. The organization as a whole is an invention of Mr. John Wesley, and was constructed for a single and definite purpose, — to communicate the impulse of that revival of religious faith and fervor, which begun with him and his associates, as widely as possible. The instrument by which this was to be accomplished was a band of preachers of the gospel with an almost military organization, of which Mr. Wesley himself was, during his lifetime, the head. The system had in it almost the compactness of the order of Jesuits. Each preacher was subject to the will of his superior, to the full extent of holding himself in readiness to go anywhere and do any work which was assigned him. The whole system was thus controlled by a single will. He had thus during his lifetime, and after his death, the bishops who succeeded him at the head of the system, the absolute control of a constantly increasing army of earnest preachers, to communicate the impulse to every part of England, and over the seas wherever the English language was spoken. Recruits were made for this spiritual army, not chiefly from the learned and cultivated classes, but largely from the unlearned, and reliance was placed for their success on their zeal and earnestness, and on such efforts at self-improvement as they might make while prosecuting their work. The lasting aim of the whole organization is to give efficiency and ubiquity to this spiritual army.

That it has been efficient is abundantly attested by the vast numbers who have been gathered into the Methodist connection, wherever the English language is spoken. Such importance do vast multitudes of men attach to that peculiar organization by which these results have been achieved, that they feel an insuperable objection to any church principles, which tend to weaken or essentially modify it. The system is, in their minds, consecrated and made sacred, not only by the venerable name of Mr. Wesley, but by the great results it has achieved. Such men will look upon the doctrines I am advocating with great suspicion and distrust. They will entertain a grave apprehension, that in so far as these doctrines gain prevalence, they will destroy the cement which binds together the great Methodist system, and merge its membership without discrimination in the great mass of the disciples of Christ, so that its organic machinery will no longer be available as an instrument of propagandism. It cannot be denied that such apprehensions are not without foundation. The itinerant ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church holds the power of the keys. The whole discipline of the church is subject to its control. It holds the guardianship of baptism and the Lord's Supper in its hands, and freely exercises it over all the vast membership of the church. It is here as everywhere else in the history of christendom a mighty instrument of power. It is in this, as in all the other great ecclesiastical systems, the foundation upon which the whole superstructure is reared. That this superstructure can, more than any other, be maintained without it, I do not believe. I do not ask the men who so keenly feel the force of this objection to believe it.

No well-informed man will doubt, that the peculiar ecclesiastical machinery of Methodism has achieved

great and important results in its brief history. But it is too much to assume, either that it was the only or even the best system that could have been devised for the purpose, or that it will prove suited to all the exigencies of the church of God in all the future. It is possible that our friends of the Methodist connection do not always appreciate their true relation to the religious progress of the times. It is just possible, that in the exhilaration of success, they sometimes fail duly to estimate the importance of other forces which are at work in the world besides those which they are wielding. It certainly is true, that the results in which they themselves rejoice could not have been achieved without the presence and activity of other religious bodies in the midst of which they have acted. Without them their system would have been but the one half of a pair of shears. The necessity of the Methodist system has resulted from the defects of other religious bodies ; and those defects are caused by that faulty constitution of the church, which I am endeavoring to point out. Their faulty and imperfect constitution left a want in the world which for the time being Methodism has admirably supplied. But that want will not exist forever. It will pass away, and with it the necessity for the peculiar function of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

That system is already showing, that it is not adapted to meet all the exigencies of the present and the future. By nothing is it more strikingly characterized of late than by the rapid changes it is undergoing. He whose memory goes back far enough to enable him to compare the Methodism of fifty years ago with that of the present, can hardly recognize its identity. These changes are all in the direction of rendering the Methodists less a peculiar people, and more like the membership of other Christian bodies. That it is rapidly becoming one of

the greatest, perhaps the greatest of the Protestant sects is cheerfully admitted ; but with this growth it is becoming in other respects more and more like the rest of us. This indicates clearly enough, that Methodists themselves are conscious, that the peculiarities of their system are no longer adapted as formerly to the work to be done, and that great changes have become necessary, to adapt it to the altered circumstances in which it is to act. It has been claimed that Methodism is peculiarly fitted for frontier work, and that therefore it will continue to be of great value, as long as there is any frontier work to be done. This assertion is partly true, but it is much too sweeping. Nowhere was frontier work ever more thoroughly and effectually done than in New England ; and it was inorganic Congregationalism that did it. Presbyterianism did grand frontier work in Western Pennsylvania. Never did Methodism work more efficiently on the frontier than did Presbyterianism and Congregationalism in Northern Ohio. Congregationalism, a mere "rope of sand" as it is, is stretching out its hands to-day along a vast frontier in Minnesota and Dakota, with a vigor never surpassed by any organization however compact and military. But why dwell on these examples ? It was no compact and army-like organization, that carried the gospel in the primitive age to the Euphrates on the East, and the pillars of Hercules on the West. It was fervent faith and the oneness of that spiritual catholicity, which the Founder of the church instituted. Whenever the Lord's people will return again to a like faith and a like catholicity, they will need no compact organization to do frontier work, and to achieve miracles in the propagation of the gospel. Every wilderness shall be glad for them ; every desert shall rejoice and bud and blossom as the rose.

There are stubborn facts which indicate beyond contradiction, that the Methodist system is not suited to the exigencies of the times, nay, that it stands as an impassable barrier to the steps of progress which it is indispensable that the people of God should take. I have no unkindly feelings towards any of my brethren, no antipathies to which I am impelled to give utterance, no wrongs either of myself or my party to revenge. But it is impossible to accomplish the task which I have undertaken, without the utmost freedom of utterance. Such freedom I must claim and use. Nowhere in the world has the sectarian condition of modern Christianity so completely produced and ripened its appropriate fruits as in some of the great States of the Upper Mississippi Valley. The state of things existing there has been already alluded to ; but it is necessary to allude to it again as an illustration of the matter now under consideration. Over great districts of some of those States, sectarian divisions have become so minute that it is impossible to sustain any effective and satisfactory arrangements for public worship, outside the cities and large towns. It is clearly and demonstrably impossible to accomplish anything for the improvement of our religious civilization, except by the union of Christian people now embraced in different sects in a common effort for the religious welfare of themselves and their children and their neighbors. In the progress of the work, we have come upon an obstacle which the Methodist phalanx, though as compact as the Macedonian, cannot break through. It is not adapted to the work to be done. The more compact the worse. It is not compactness but solubility that is wanted, in order that the elements now all too strongly combined together in inert sectarian masses, may be set at liberty from their bondage, and combine themselves in that one

vital product of faith and love, a church of Jesus Christ.

Many excellent men believe that the arrangements of the Methodist Church go far to relieve that religious destitution which I complain of as existing in the rural districts. I cannot agree with them. They may have provided places of public worship at such distances from each other, that if the people were all earnestly desirous of assembling for the worship of God, most families might reach them. But at those houses of worship, they make no adequate provision for the religious instruction and edification of the community. Perhaps the circuit preacher delivers two discourses a month at each of these places of worship. Probably at many of them he has not more than one appointment in a month. The intermediate Sabbaths may be supplied, or they may not, by the local preachers of the vicinity. But they are men who obtain their livelihood by the various secular occupations, and have little special fitness for ministering to the spiritual edification of the people. The community is not reached. In this respect the Methodist Church has no special pre-eminence over other Protestant religious bodies. It reaches its own members, and is in a great measure foreign to the rest of the people. Meanwhile it presents a powerful obstacle to any united effort of all who love Christ for the religious welfare of the community. It holds its own members with great tenacity. The circuit preacher derives his support from several places of worship, each of which he visits once or twice a month, and cannot afford to relinquish his hold on the small pittance which he receives from any one of them. The aim of the army-like organization is the ubiquity of the Methodist preacher, and that object will be pursued with the same unfaltering energy, whatever the

nature of the obstacles encountered. When the thing to be done is to carry the gospel of Christ into regions beyond, where there are none to speak for him, it is very well ; but these are not the conditions under which the Methodist system is pushed in the regions to which I refer. In innumerable instances, it is only an effort to hold fast a handful of adherents of Methodism, and prevent their being merged in the mass of religious people around them, in a united organization for the spiritual welfare of the whole community. The system contends with the same tireless energy to maintain the separateness of Methodists from all other Christian people, as to proclaim the gospel where Christ is not named. In this respect Methodism pursues its work precisely as it would do if its adherents believed it to be the one only true church, out of which there is no salvation. Let me not be misunderstood. I do not mean that Methodists hold any such exclusive doctrine, but that they adhere to their system and carry it out just as though they did.

It may be true that the same charge may to a considerable extent be made against other religious bodies, but it seems to me thoughtful Methodists would, on reflection, admit that it is somewhat pre-eminently true of them. I am not without my hopes that they will also agree with other Christian people in admitting, that it is wrong ; that it is an application of the machinery for propagandism founded by Wesley, which that truly apostolic man never intended. The time has certainly come over vast regions of our country, when the kingdom of Christ is no longer to be promoted by pushing any one of our great Protestant organizations with unscrupulous zeal in advance of all others, but by uniting all Christians in whatever bonds of sect they may have been bound up, in the common faith of Jesus

Christ our Lord, and in co-operative effort for the salvation of themselves and their families and the communities in which they dwell. Any sect, no matter how sound in faith, no matter what victories it may have achieved in the past, or how exultant in its successes, which holds a portion of a community separate from their Christian neighbors, and hinders their co-operation with all that love Christ, in efforts to provide for the permanent spiritual culture of the community, where only by such unity that culture can be provided for, stands opposed to the true interests of religion, and the progress of Christ's kingdom among us. It is high time that every man in whatever religious connection should lay this matter seriously to heart. A sect that employs the religious machinery which the sainted Wesley devised, for the promotion of its own ubiquity and power, rather than for the kingdom of God, is just so far acting on principles which cannot be justified, when judged by the Christian standard. Few of our sects it is to be feared can honestly judge themselves by this standard without self-condemnation.

The objection to the church principles advocated in this book, which will be chiefly insisted on by those who are attached to the Congregational polity, was considered in the chapter on church discipline.

CHAPTER VII.

CONGREGATIONALISM.

It has been my aim to pursue this discussion with the strictest impartiality. I was born indeed and cradled in Congregationalism. Under it I received the nurture of my childhood and youth. But I had not acquired the slightest partiality for it, when I received ordination from Congregational hands. The churches with which I had been connected had represented to my mind, not a peculiar mode of ecclesiastical organization, but the church of God, and to that I was devoutly attached. It was only amid the stern and often very trying experiences of the Christian ministry and of missionary life on the frontiers of civilization, that I first learned to love and cherish those church principles under which I had grown up, without however having been educated in them, or understood them in their relations to other systems of church polity. Under those circumstances I acquired, in the early part of my ministry, a very decided attachment to the general principles, and especially to the aim and spirit of that polity, and with it my life has been rather intimately associated. I am therefore strongly impelled by what amounts to almost a feeling of necessity, to point out the bearing of the doctrines I advocate on that polity, as held by its founders in the seventeenth century, and by the churches of this country.

At this stage of the inquiry, the reader need not be told that I hold, that the church universal, the kingdom of heaven, can have no earthly or official organization, and that the only organized church which Christianity admits is the local society of believers. This also is rigidly bound by all the laws and general principles of the universal kingdom. In this respect the Congregationalism of the pilgrim fathers is in close agreement with the principles and practices of apostolic times. The whole Christian world is laid under great obligation to the churches of that form, for having proved by the experience of three hundred years, that it is possible for modern christendom to return to the simple mode of organization practised by the apostles, and to enjoy under it a high degree of prosperity, purity and spiritual power. This they have proved beyond any reasonable attempt at gainsaying. The independence of the local church of all control except that of the Master himself is not a mere theory of visionary minds, but has been as thoroughly and as successfully tested by experience as any of the organizations of Protestantism. It very strongly commends itself to the favorable consideration of the whole Christian world by some of the results which it has produced.

One of these results which is worthy of honorable mention is the spirit of genuine catholicity which has grown up under its influence. It is the only one of the Protestant sects, which has ever manifested a willingness, in the very fulness of power and opportunity, to impart its strength to another organization, for the sake of promoting the unity and prosperity of the church of Christ. While Congregationalists were by far the strongest and most numerous body in this country, and enjoyed unequalled advantages for spreading themselves abroad over the continent, they did freely contribute

their pecuniary resources, and a body of emigrants the most enlightened and influential that any people ever sent out, to strengthen and build up other religious bodies, and that only because they dreaded and abhorred sectarian divisions, and wished to promote the unity of the church, along those frontiers where their emigrants in great numbers were mingling with Christian people of other polities. This they continued to do for fifty years, because they believed the gospel and united effort in promoting it to be more important than any mere polity however excellent. This they would have continued to do till the present time, if passing events had not taught them by painful experience, that that catholic spirit which was leading them to sacrifice their own simple polity could not be conserved under those centralized systems, to which they were profusely contributing their wealth and their numbers. The increasing complications of sect along all the frontier made hundreds of enlightened men feel the preciousness of that spirit of catholicity which they had learned in the bosom of Congregationalism, and the urgent necessity of returning to the simple polity of their fathers, that they might conserve that spirit, and transmit it to their children after them.

Another proof that Congregationalism has cultivated a catholic spirit is found in the fact, that intelligent Congregationalists are seldom apologists for sect. It is remarkable that the two religious organizations of Protestantism that are most widely separated from each other in their organic principles, most resemble each other in their disapprobation of sectarian divisions, and their attachment to a catholic unity of the church. It is true indeed that the catholicity of the one is official and organic, and that of the other inorganic and spiritual; but both Congregationalists and Episcopalians

believe in the oneness of the Christian church, and pray for its realization, and are very seldom found apologizing for the present divided and distracted condition of christendom. The adherents of other Protestant organizations very generally claim, that no platform of the church is found in the New Testament, and that its constitution is left to be decided by the taste and judgment of the Lord's people. If this is so, it follows of course that the present divided condition of the Christian world is normal, and accordant with the plan of the Founder of the church, and is to be perpetual. It is surely not strange that persons who hold this view of the subject should seek to convince themselves and others, that Jesus Christ acted wisely in thus opening all the floodgates of sect, and that the present sectarian condition of the church is as wise and beneficent as it is inevitable. Persons who hold this view are sectarians from principle. They are compelled to believe that Jesus Christ was a sectarian, that he founded his church on sectarian principles, and that he meant that it should be divided into sects, through all the cycles of time.

Such men may believe in a moral and spiritual catholicity, but it is a catholicity which is contradicted by all the arrangements of the church militant, and is destined never to be manifested in this world, except in such occasional acts of fraternity as may be found possible in the midst of the perpetual rivalries of distinct church governments, each endeavoring to exercise jurisdiction over the greatest possible numbers. Congregationalism creates no logical necessity of defending this view of the subject. It maintains no modes of organization which are not accordant with the examples furnished by the New Testament, or which are in spirit contradictory to catholicity. There is no logical reason

why a Congregationalist should not believe in the Holy Catholic Church, and pray and hopefully labor for its realization in this world. It is for this reason doubtless, that Congregationalism has always tended to a larger catholicity than the other Protestant sects, larger than Anglicanism ; for that has no conception of any catholicity except that which is comprehended within its own organization, while Congregationalism is comprehensive of all the disciples of Christ. The careful study of this subject will easily teach us, that the organic principles under which we live exert great influence in the formation of character.

The church principles advocated in this book call for no change in the external organization of the Congregational churches, except in one particular, and in relation to that we shall all be agreed. The system has not hitherto entirely avoided tendencies to local schism. Two or more churches are often organized in the same community, in circumstances in which they cannot but be rivals to each other, rather than mutual helpers of a common interest. They often result from personal feelings or passions. They are sometimes produced by diversities of opinion in respect to matters confessedly of minor importance, and sometimes altogether local and temporary in their character. Congregationalism is no more chargeable with a tendency to such agitations and divisions than other forms of Protestantism. Perhaps it would not be difficult to show that it is even less so. But it must be admitted, that it is not free from such a tendency, and that it has not hitherto successfully resisted it. This is an evil which has been more or less prevalent under all forms of religious organization, and which can only be remedied by more deeply imbuing the whole multitude of the disciples with Christian principles and the spirit of the Master. A local church

should never be divided except from an upright and dispassionate conviction that the general good requires it. Two churches should never be planted in such circumstances, that they will be in any proper sense the rivals of each other. New churches ought not to be organized except with the approbation of the whole Christian community affected by them. When increased accommodations are needed, it is often better to provide them by erecting larger church edifices than by multiplying church organizations. Churches ought to be separated from each other, as far as possible, not by personal affinities or the lines which divide social classes, but by strictly geographical boundaries. The spirit of the gospel pre-eminently requires that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant should meet together in the worship of God, and devoutly acknowledge the Lord as the maker of them all. In this respect Congregationalism ought to be much more thoroughly controlled by its own fundamental principles than it is. It ought much more earnestly to avoid local divisions, and to make more use of geographical lines in defining the boundaries of churches than it has hitherto done. Sect is utterly regardless of such lines in its organic arrangements. It is, for the most part, considerate only of the means of making the greatest possible number of proselytes to itself ; and when it has free course, will erect all the churches for a city of twenty thousand people, within the circuit of a few rods, on the same principles of competition by which all the banks of such a city are generally found in close proximity to each other. I can never look at the situation of churches in relation to each other in towns and cities without a sense of humiliation and shame. It reveals the fact, that Christians are in the habit of deciding questions of the

gravest practical importance from a regard to the interests of rival churches, and not to the general good. The fact is disgraceful to our common Christianity. Congregationalists have the means of avoiding this evil, and they should use them.

The doctrines of this book do require one change in the internal economy of Congregationalism, and only one of any fundamental importance. Our historical Congregationalism has held to the power of the keys as tenaciously as other Protestant organizations; and, as it has earnestly believed in the duty of preserving the purity of the church by diligent and faithful discipline, it has applied that power more zealously and more conspicuously than any other Protestant organization. If I am right in my conclusions, it is of essential importance that Congregational churches should greatly modify their discipline, both in theory and practice. Their theory of a network of independent local churches covering states, nations and the whole world, not the rivals but the helpers of each other, and united together as a world-wide fraternity of faith and love, is truly apostolic. It antedates the boasted ancient forms of Christian organizations, the papal church, the Nicene church, the clergy in three orders; the first link of its chain of succession is securely held in apostolic hands. But it has need to unlearn one bad lesson which was taught it by the hard task-master to which the church was so long enslaved. It has need to unlearn the false interpretation of our Lord's prediction in respect to Peter, which has been tenaciously adhered to through more than fifteen centuries of spiritual despotism in the church of God, and to return to that spiritual nurture which Jesus provided for his people in all generations.

There are peculiar and urgent reasons why Congre-

gationalists should make haste to abandon that erroneous conception of discipline, which has been pointed out in previous chapters, and adopt that moral discipline which Jesus inculcated. No form of Protestantism has been so seriously in earnest to make a faithful application of church discipline as Congregationalism. On the other hand, if true church discipline really means the power of the keys, no other Protestant organization is so ill adapted to its successful application. The power of the keys converts the body that holds it into a judicial tribunal, an ecclesiastical court charged with the duty of trying, convicting and punishing the guilty. If Congregationalism recognizes the power of the keys at all, it places it in the hands of the brotherhood of the local church, and thus constitutes it a judicial tribunal. All history shows that the worst possible arrangement of the judicial power is to commit it to a popular assembly. Whatever else popular assemblies may be fitted to do, they are not fitted to perform the judicial function. Yet in the three hundred years of the history of the Congregational churches of modern times, they have been performing this function. That they have performed it so well, and maintained so high a degree of unity, prosperity and spiritual power, while bearing a burden to which their constitution is so ill adapted, is marvellous indeed, and proves the excellence of the system as a whole.

The history of Congregational church discipline, if it were justly written, might not always be pleasant reading, but, in its relations to the subject we are considering, could not but be interesting and important. It would prove that those churches have produced in large masses of human beings a disinterested love of righteousness, a power of self-control, a successful moral culture, which never have been surpassed under any

other system. Yet the proofs are numerous, that its prosperity and spiritual power have been greatly hindered by the exercise of the judicial function under circumstances peculiarly difficult and embarrassing. The conduct of any case of judicial discipline, unless it is one of flagrant crime, in respect to which the evidence is so clear as to leave no possible room for divided opinion, is almost sure to divide the church into parties more or less embittered against each other, and to inflict wounds which can only be healed by time, and imperfectly at the best. The pastor is apt to find great difficulty in satisfying both parties of his impartiality, and is therefore very likely to become unacceptable to one or the other. The community outside of the church takes sides, the majority often being opposed to the action which is finally adopted by the church, and therefore alienated from it. It is impossible to decide to what extent the discipline of these churches may have been influential in producing that alienation from them, which notoriously exists at the present time in the irreligious masses that surround them.

It would also be a very curious chapter in the history of the Congregational churches of New England, which should truly exhibit the influence which their discipline has exerted, in inducing portions of the people to seek connection with other forms of religious organization, and thus introducing sectarian divisions, which in former times were almost unknown. The time is within my own memory, when very many of the country towns of New England knew almost nothing of a division of sects. How widely that state of things must have differed from the present is quite obvious to all well-informed persons. I do not believe it possible successfully to deny, that the divisions, the alienations, the heart-burnings, the bitter animosities which have been

produced by frequently occurring cases of discipline conducted on judicial principles have had very large influence in facilitating the introduction of the other forms of religious organization, which now divide the people. No people can witness the frequent occurrence of judicial investigations conducted by popular assemblies, either civil or ecclesiastical, without disgust. What has taken place in this respect was what must have taken place anywhere, human nature remaining the same. If it can be shown that Jesus Christ has constituted the brotherhood of every local church an ecclesiastical court, bound to hear charges, to subject them to a judicial trial, to acquit or to convict and condemn, and to pronounce the sentence of exclusion from the table of the Lord on the impenitent guilty, then let them gird themselves for the work in the strength of the Lord, encouraged by the experience of three hundred years, that they can perform this difficult task and yet retain a degree of spiritual prosperity unsurpassed by any religious body. But if, as we have shown, the Lord has never laid any such burden on the local church, let her cease to usurp it; and gladly undertake in its stead that kindly moral and spiritual culture of the whole brotherhood which our Lord enjoins.

It has already been noticed in another chapter, that at the present time the discipline of the churches has passed into neglect and disuse. Good men deplore this with deep sorrow, and well they may. But they can never return again to such discipline as has existed in the past. Discipline the churches must have, or cease to be the churches of Jesus Christ. But it never can be the discipline of the court-room, the judicial tribunal any more. It must be that moral culture which is proper to a loving Christian household, and

not the cold, hard contest of what men call a court of justice. Will the reader pardon me? I was a member of the church from early years. I saw much of church discipline in my youth. No language I am now able to command can adequately express the moral agony I experienced in my tender years in witnessing the progress of those processes. The church in which most of them occurred was then in its infancy on the frontier. It is now strong in its noble maturity. But we may be sure it received and inflicted wounds in those struggles, which I still remember with deep sorrow. They might have been avoided, and would have been, if we had understood the way of God more perfectly.

I have here represented the peculiar difficulties of a judicial church discipline, as it exists in Congregational churches. Let it not however be supposed that it encounters no difficulties under other ecclesiastical systems. It is not appropriate to point out those difficulties in this place. It is only necessary to remark here, that under some ecclesiastical systems they are avoided by neglecting discipline altogether, or at least by substituting for the fraternal fidelity of all the members the oversight of the clergy. Under other systems, where there has been an effort to maintain discipline in its purity, it has been found to involve difficulties of another character indeed, but not less serious than those which are experienced in connection with Congregationalism.

Congregational churches have always been deeply in earnest to preserve the Christian faith in its purity. I am well aware that many persons can at present be found, to whom this seems the very thing which is most amiss in their past history. In their zeal for what they call liberality, such persons assume that it is really of

no consequence, that even the church of Christ should stand by any system of faith at all, and the fact that any religious body zealously endeavors to maintain any system of doctrine is conclusive proof of bigotry. I am quite unable to agree with them. It is the height of absurdity to apply the name Christian to any man or any body of men that does not believe in the Christ of the New Testament, the Christ of God. The whole characteristic influence of Christianity in the world has been exerted by that gospel which Paul says he preached to the Corinthians.¹ No man justly incurs the charge of bigotry, because he holds fast to the truth. The man who lays claim to the credit of "liberality," because he holds fast to nothing, is guilty of both absurdity and arrogance. They only are "liberal" who "prove all things," and "hold fast to that which is good." But it is not necessary to maintain that Congregationalists have always been wise in the methods which they have adopted for conserving the truth as it is in Jesus. To one sound principle however they have always adhered, — that in admitting persons to membership in the local church, they are to receive with cordial welcome all true disciples of Christ. They have believed, and rightly, that faith is an element of character, and that therefore, in estimating character, the relations of the mind to evangelic truth are certainly to be taken into the account. They have always believed that it is absurd to welcome to the household of faith persons who do not believe in Christ. As has already been remarked, the early Congregational churches judged of the soundness of the faith of candidates for admission by their own personal confessions. The young, the inexperienced, the unlearned expressed their faith

¹ 1 Cor. xv: 1-8.

in Christ by such few and simple words as they were able understandingly to employ. Persons of more experience, intelligence and culture were expected to give fuller expression in their own language to their views of the gospel.

At a later period in their history, the plan was adopted, and to a great extent is still retained, of requiring each candidate for admission to the church to give public and solemn assent to a prescribed formulary of doctrine, recognized as the creed of the church. This was not regarded as inconsistent with the fundamental principle already stated, — that all true disciples are to be welcomed to membership in the local church. It is true these creeds often went into considerable detail as to points of doctrine, and embraced many of the points at issue in the theological controversies of modern times. But they were intended only to embrace so much of evangelical truth as any true disciple might be expected willingly to subscribe to. I am unable to believe that this change in the original practice of the churches was an improvement. It would be difficult to show either that many of the creeds of Congregational churches do not contain phraseology which the young, the inexperienced and the uncultivated cannot be expected to comprehend the meaning of, or that they do not frequently require the candidate to assent to propositions which many even enlightened Christians do not believe. I certainly can speak from experience, that the duty of propounding articles of faith for the public solemn assent of persons who obviously cannot understand their meaning, or judge of their correctness, is not a pleasant duty to perform. It is sometimes a very painful one. Neither does it tend to conserve the doctrinal purity of the church. One cannot be made to believe a proposition by giving his assent to it when he does not under-

stand its meaning. A proposition may just as well be propounded to a candidate in a foreign language of which he does not understand a word, as in an English dress the meaning of which he is equally unable to understand. We blame Rome for offering her public prayers in an unknown tongue. We should beware of falling into the same error, by requiring the young and the uncultivated to give assent to a form of words which is to them unintelligible.

Our Presbyterian friends manage this matter much more wisely, except where they have borrowed this objectionable custom of their Congregational neighbors. I believe they never have borrowed it, except in churches made up of Congregational elements, and afterwards worked over into Presbyterianism, but still retaining this one feature of their Congregational lineage. In unadulterated Presbyterianism, chief reliance is had on the elders to judge of the fitness of applicants for membership. They do not test the doctrinal soundness of the candidate by requiring subscription or assent to a prescribed formulary of doctrine, but by personal intercourse with each individual, precisely according to the custom of the early Congregational churches. In another respect however they might borrow wisdom from the Congregational churches. With them the judgment of the eldership is final. The Congregational practice fully recognizes the autonomy of the brotherhood. No matter in what manner the fitness of the candidates may have been inquired into, the names of candidates for admission are first publicly read before the congregation, and time is allowed for objections to be made ; after which, no objections having been made, they are admitted on public profession of their faith in Christ, by the act of the whole membership of the church. This procedure is eminently

fraternal, and might be imitated by all other churches with great advantage.

The use made by the Presbyterian churches of the Calvinistic formularies of doctrine of the seventeenth century, for guarding themselves against the encroachments of error was remarked upon in a former chapter, and shown to be ineffectual and inexpedient. It is claimed in certain quarters towards which I am accustomed to look with very respectful deference, that what is called the fellowship of the Congregational churches is so constituted, as to place those churches in nearly the same relations to those formularies in which Presbyterians stand. It is true that no Congregational minister is required at his ordination to affirm his assent to those confessions. The question will not even be asked him whether he has ever read any of them. It is not improbable that at the time of his ordination he had not. Yet it is claimed that the fellowship of the churches recognizes them as its basis, and that every Congregational minister is under an implied obligation, which is no less imperative because it is only implied, not to assist in ordaining or installing in the pastoral office any one who is not in substantial agreement with those formularies. If this is a true interpretation of the system of Congregational fellowship, that system is certainly open to grave criticism. If every Congregational pastor really owes such a moral obligation, for example to the Savoy confession, then that obligation ought to be recognized and made conspicuous in the public proceedings of every ordination and installation. That would be fair, honest and straightforward; we should understand one another, and the world would understand us. In our present forms of procedure in such cases, no such impression is made. Men enter into the Congregational ministry

and become pastors of churches, without ever suspecting that they are assuming any such obligations ; and never become aware that they have assumed them, till they are informed of it by their venerable fathers in the ministry, long after those transactions are passed. If it is true that one owes a moral allegiance to any such formulary of doctrine in virtue of the fact that he receives Congregational ordination, or accepts the pastoral office in a Congregational church, that fact should appear in the transaction itself. The candidate should be required solemnly to recognize that obligation. The proceedings of ordaining and installing councils remaining as they are, and since the days of the fathers have been, it is very solemnly impressed on the candidate's mind, that he is bound to stand firmly by the whole gospel of Christ ; but it is in no way suggested to him, that he is bound by any post-apostolic interpretation of Christian doctrine.

Would the churches be willing to make such an innovation upon the usages of our fathers ? Would the good and venerable men who are arguing for such an interpretation of our system themselves be willing to propose such an innovation ? Can they then deny, that if this is what we mean, we ought to make ourselves understood, by speaking and acting accordingly ? Nothing can well be more absurd than the idea of maintaining unimpaired from generation to generation the allegiance of all ministers and churches to those formularies, by our recognized methods of procedure. If in this matter we mean just what the Presbyterian churches mean, let us adopt the same straightforward and sensible mode of expressing it. Is it not legitimate to argue, that if our fathers had so meant, they would have adopted forms and modes of procedure more expressive of their meaning ? Is not the true reason why we are not willing

to make such an innovation as that above suggested, that we do after all mean to recognize the supreme obligation of abiding by the gospel as it has come down to us from the lips of Jesus, through his own chosen witnesses, and that we do not mean to recognize any allegiance to any other standard? This is what I have always understood by Congregationalism. Is it not absurd and preposterous at this stage in our history, to claim that we are bound by any other authorities, or that we are bound by any authorities *as Congregationalists*, by which we are not bound *as Christians*?

If it is suggested, that according to this interpretation of our system, we have no fixed standard of faith, and are liable to drift no one knows where, the reply at once occurs to us, that this is only affirming that the Christianity of the Bible is not a fixed, definite and intelligible system of thought; that the Bible may mean anything which any one pleases to make it mean. This surely is not sound Congregational doctrine. It was the faith of our fathers, and it is our faith, that the Bible is an intelligible book, and that the human mind is capable of interpreting and understanding it. If there is any doctrine in respect to which Congregationalists are perfectly unanimous, it is this. It is therefore in the last degree absurd and preposterous for us to say, that to recognize the Scriptures as our only standard of faith is to deprive us of any fixed system of religious thought, to be driven we know not whither by all the winds and currents of capricious opinion. When we permit ourselves to speak thus of the Bible, we are untrue to one of the most sacred articles in the faith of our fathers. Neither they nor we have ever held any such estimate of the Scriptures.

Another answer is also obvious. We all do admit, that no formulary of doctrine can have any authority

other than its agreement with the word of God. From every such standard there is always an appeal to the Scriptures, and to the mind of God however made known. We cannot therefore protect ourselves from the drifting currents of opinion, by making ourselves fast to a prescribed formulary. We cannot make ourselves fast to it, for we know in the very attempt, that it is not infallible, and that we ourselves may yet discover that it is erroneous. Such formularies of doctrine are not, as men suppose, rocks in the stream of human thought. Language changes its meaning. Men continue to use the same language, while their thinking undergoes radical revolution. Of the abstract and technical language of the formularies of doctrine this is pre-eminently true. Of the language of common life, of the concrete forms which the imagination employs, of the pictures which she draws, it is not true. They are as permanent and changeless as the creations of the pencil and the chisel. If we honestly determine to hold fast to the word of God, we shall not drift. We shall be at the mercy of the winds and waves no more. We shall have made ourselves fast to the changeless realities of the moral universe. But the attempt to resist the influence of opinion by erecting any statement of doctrine into a standard of faith is as hopeless as the attempt to protect a vessel against the influence of the current by making it fast to another vessel which is borne along upon the bosom of the same stream.

If, as we believe, the Scriptures contain a revelation from God of those great spiritual realities, the knowledge of which is necessary to the attainment of our destiny, then to stand fast by those realities is to secure for ourselves and for all who stand with us all the protection against changing currents of opinion, and all the permanency of religious thought, which are either pos-

sible or desirable. But to attempt to obtain such security for our system by erecting into a standard, by which men are to estimate the soundness of each other's faith, any confessedly fallible statement of doctrine, is no less hopeless than the effort to protect ourselves against motion by making fast to a moving body.

It may be said that all Christian sects profess to hold fast to the Scriptures, and that if we recognize no other standard, there will be nothing to distinguish us from other bodies of Christians. Why do we wish to be distinguished from other bodies of Christians? What so desirable as that our sect should be merged in the great ocean of the one faith of the gospel? Instead of regarding this as a calamity, we should recognize it as an end devoutly to be sought and prayed for. But unfortunately the allegation is not true. If we should have the wisdom and the grace to stand together, with no creed but the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel, there would still remain enough sadly to distinguish us as a peculiar people. On the one hand, our firm adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus would distinguish us from all who reject that truth; and on the other hand the shibboleths of sect so tenaciously retained by bodies of Christian disciples, who still insist on abiding by sectarian forms and standards, would only too thoroughly separate between us and them. Our wisdom still would be to find out if possible the one position which we can and must occupy in steadfast fidelity to our Master, and lovingly invite our brethren of every name to stand with us on the one basis of a common faith in Jesus Christ, and thus patiently wait till the Holy Catholic church as Jesus conceived of it shall stand revealed before all the world.

It seems necessary to speak a little of what is tech-

nically called the fellowship of the churches. As there is at present not a little excited and partisan feeling on this subject, it would have been desirable to pass it by in silence. But the subject is too important to the work in hand to be altogether omitted in the discussion. The superficial reader of our literature is quite likely to fail to notice, that the technical meaning of these words differs widely from the meaning they would naturally suggest to one unacquainted with our history. To such a reader the phrase might naturally suggest that relation of independent churches to one another, which Chevalier Bunsen and Archbishop Whately have shown to have really existed among the churches founded by the apostles. Whately's language is, "That, though the many churches founded by the apostles were branches of one *scriptural brotherhood*, — though there was 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' for all of them, yet they were each a distinct, independent community *on earth*, united by the common principles on which they were founded, and by their mutual agreement, affection and respect ; but not having any one head on earth, or acknowledging any sovereignty of one of the societies over another." Bunsen's account of the matter is substantially the same. There was a genuine fellowship between those churches. It was just such a fellowship as that which exists between individual good men everywhere. It was but a recognition of the natural and universal fraternity which binds all virtuous beings and communities together. It was a fellowship which no more limited the independence of the churches than the fellowship of individuals limits individual independence. Doubtless if my neighbor violates the laws of morality which should regulate the conduct of men to each other, my confidence in him will be impaired. I shall no longer trust him nor co-operate with him as

before. The bond of moral confidence that bound us together is broken, and can only be restored by his repentance and return to the ways of virtue.

Precisely the same thing will hold as between such independent churches. The confidence which each reposes in every other depends on their mutual fidelity to their common principles. No one church, nor any group of churches has any sovereignty over any other. In such a fellowship of independent Christian churches we all believe. In just so far as this is admitted to be a correct and complete statement of the relations in which Congregational churches stand to each other, no controversy can arise on the subject. The conception of such a network of independent churches, thus related to each other, covering nations and extending itself by the spiritual conquests of the gospel, till it shall cover the whole inhabited earth, is scriptural, practical, beautiful, grand, and by the grace of God may become actual. Will the reader pardon the egotism? This is the Congregationalism with which I fell in love in the ardor of my youth, and my affection is not chilled by the frosts of age. No, it is the Holy Catholic church which apostles founded, and it has a moral grandeur, in comparison with which the organic catholicity of the papal church and of all other churches is mean and contemptible.

But there is a conception of the "fellowship of the churches" which is tenaciously held and zealously advocated by many whom I sincerely revere and honor, which, if I understand it, cannot be maintained consistently with the true conception of the church of Christ. According to that understanding of the matter, the phrase describes a league existing among all Congregational churches, which constitutes those churches as truly an organized society under a centralized government, as

any of the other Protestant sects. Its constitution and laws are not written in a code, but consist of a body of historic precedents, which are no less binding on the churches than the constitution of the Presbyterian church. They have no formally recognized creed, but the various acts of their synods and general councils are just as truly their standards, as the Westminster Confession and Catechisms are the standards of the Presbyterian church in the United States. The decisions of councils are said to be advisory, not mandatory, and to have no force or validity "other than the reasonableness thereof." But if a church to which the advice is given disregards such advice in practice, it incurs a liability of being called to account for its conduct before another council, and being by its decision ejected from the fellowship of the churches. It is certainly hard to distinguish between the right to give such advice, and the right to command. Such a right of sister churches to advise, and to call to account for not following their advice, is a real negation of the independence of the churches. In a controversy which unfortunately sprung up several years ago between Dr. now Bishop Huntington and myself, certainly without any fault of mine, I said, "He who so holds the fellowship of the churches as to impair their independence, or so holds their independence as to impair their fellowship, has yet to learn the A, B, C of Congregationalism."

This could not now be said, without calling in question the intelligence of venerated men, who doubtless know a great deal more about Congregationalism than I do. As to the question what the system really is, I have no thought of setting my judgment against theirs, or of claiming to be an authority in the case. Let the recognized expounders of Congregational law decide that question. I shall not enter upon the discussion of

it. I cannot however forbear remarking, that if the account above given of the fellowship of the churches is a true exposition of the matter, then our methods of procedure have great need of amendment. They are far better fitted to deceive than to convey a true idea of the spirit of our system. We seem to be giving advice when we are really issuing a command. We seem to have no standard of truth and righteousness but the word of God, while we really recognize another standard, which after all we confess not to be infallible; and yet we are liable to be ejected from fellowship for deviating from it. We seem to stand on the broad foundation which Jesus Christ himself has laid for the church universal; and yet we as truly hem ourselves in by sectarian lines as any of our neighbors, by imposing on each other standards which Christ never imposed, and exercising authority over sister churches which he never gave us. If this is our meaning, we should make no delay in so altering our phraseology and our forms and methods of procedure, that they shall plainly express the real spirit of the system. As things are, we have no right to complain that many have accepted our system without being aware that it is liable to any such sectarian interpretation, honestly thinking in the simplicity of their hearts, that it is just what it seems to be, the independency, "the scriptural brotherhood of the churches founded by the apostles." It is not strange that multitudes have identified themselves with Congregationalism, who had no heart to select one out of the numerous rival sects of Christianity, but honestly meant to stand for life on the broad platform of the church universal,—the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel,—with no commitment to any sect whatever. If these persons have not understood Congregationalism correctly, let them be unde-

ceived. Let that system define its position as a sect with a clearness which cannot be misunderstood, let it clothe itself in phraseology and forms and methods of procedure, which are appropriately expressive of its spirit and aims. It will then no longer attract those who are in harmony with Christ and the kingdom of God, but have no sympathy with it as a sect. For myself, I am far from believing that the great body of Congregationalists desire or would accept any such change of form and phraseology. From their hearts they wish to stand on that broad platform of catholicity, which the system, as expounded by the sainted Robinson, seems to mean.

Had it been either necessary or useful thus to limit the independence of the churches, in order to maintain their fellowship in the gospel, the apostles would have perceived that necessity, and provided for it. No one can pretend that they have left behind them any trace of the existence of any such league of neighbor churches to exercise an oversight and limit the independent action of particular churches. The arrangement is entirely unsupported by any apostolic example. There is indeed abundant proof, that the primitive churches recognized the fraternal tie that bound them together, and sustained each other in all practicable ways by mutual sympathy and help. There can be no doubt that if any church had abandoned the faith and forsaken Christ, it would have dropped out of the fellowship. But it would have been accomplished without any organic action, by its losing the confidence of churches that remained faithful, and ceasing to co-operate with them in the work of the Lord, just as any individual man loses his position among virtuous men, by giving himself up to a vicious life. In either case the rupture of the fraternal tie would be natural and

spontaneous, and not the result of a judicial investigation and the decree of a court.

It should be constantly borne in mind, that the first step of departure from the primitive pattern was the erection of the officers of the church into a clergy with priestly functions, exclusively empowered to bring the people near to God by dispensing to them baptism and the Lord's Supper. Then came the priesthood in three orders, the bishop alone being able to confer clerical powers by the laying on of his hands. Nothing can be clearer than that this was a departure from primitive usage. Then the limitation of the autonomy of the local church became inevitable and its ultimate destruction certain. No church had more than one bishop. A bishop could only be ordained by two or more bishops. No church therefore could have a bishop without a convention of two or more bishops of sister churches. Such a convention having the exclusive power of placing bishops over particular churches would find ample occasions for interfering in the management of its affairs, limiting and in process of time destroying its independence. There can be no reasonable doubt, that by this process the autonomy of the churches was overturned, and the centralized government of the church in later ages ultimately produced. Congregationalists would do well to bear these facts in mind, and shun those very processes by which the apostolic constitution of the church was subverted, and utterly lost for ages. There is no reason to think that like causes will not produce like effects in modern as in ancient times. Nor are there wanting indications before our eyes, that the same causes which overturned the independence of the primitive churches are working to a similar result now. If Congregational churches mean to maintain their independence, they must be jealous of causes which

threaten its subversion. They must beware how they are drawn into bondage and ecclesiastical vassalage by any pleas of fellowship, or by any attempts to erect other standards of faith than the word of God. They must dare reverently to study the apostolic testimony, and resolutely to abide by the results of such study, prosecuted in devout dependence on the promised aids of God's Spirit. On these conditions only can they hope permanently to abide on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the Chief Corner-Stone. Such Congregationalism can endure till the millennium, and abide through its blessed ages. Congregationalism as a sect must vanish away with all other sects.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE.

No forms of government are so sure to be developed logically as those which have to do with religion. Such governments always have to do with conscience, and conscience is a powerful auxiliary of logic. It is very true indeed that many persons have much to do with the management of religious affairs, who seem to have no conscience at all. But even such persons are always under the necessity of respecting the consciences of the people. When therefore a principle is adopted, there is a necessity that it should be logically applied, and that systems which are built upon it should be harmonious with it, and should carry it out to its just consequences. When we can be sure that we understand the principles upon which any ecclesiastical system is built, and know its history, we can be sure of its future development. If this is so, the present ecclesiastical condition of christendom furnishes abundant material for profound and highly interesting study, and may be studied with the hope of throwing much light on questions which relate to the destiny of Christianity in coming ages. It is not absurd to raise the question even now, What is to be the destiny of the church of Christ in the future history of this world ?

Enterprising and thoughtful minds cannot help studying that question, and trying to predict what are to be

the future phases and aspects of religious thought and civilization as the astronomer foretells the phenomena of the starry heavens in coming ages ; or as the statesman seeks to forecast the destiny of states and nations, and of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Many minds busy themselves in greater or less degree with such speculations. They are not to be blamed for it. A generous and active mind that believes in the perpetuity of the Christian religion and the church of God, must be profoundly interested in such inquiries. It must however be acknowledged, that the results which have hitherto been achieved in this field of inquiry are not sufficiently uniform, to warrant the belief that the principles on which such inquiries are to be conducted are settled and well understood. It is very difficult for any one sufficiently to emancipate himself from the prejudices of his own sect, and his education, to survey the future with an impartial judgment. Ages elapsed before astronomy could escape from the assumption, that this little planet which we inhabit is the centre of the universe, perpetually at rest, while the solar system and the starry heavens revolve around it. Any progress in astronomical knowledge was impossible, till this obstinate prejudice had been conquered. We all encounter the danger of utterly failing in our efforts to understand the present condition of the world in respect to religion, and to forecast its future, by a similar overestimate of the relative importance of a narrow and limited social system in which our own lives are passed. That order of things in which we ourselves are living seems to us as fixed and motionless, as the solid earth did to the ancient astronomers, while everything around us seems to be in motion.

The zealous Romanist confidently affirms that the Reformation was a huge blunder, that three hundred

years of experience have demonstrated that Protestantism is a failure, destined soon to pass away, and that all true Christian people must soon return to the bosom of the papal church, and find that repose under the sheltering wing of its authority which Protestantism can never afford. They are quite confident that what Protestants call the spiritual despotism of the papal church is only the social order which God has established, without which history can only be a miserable alternation of anarchy and secular despotism. Such men exhort us with a fervid eloquence, which they would have us mistake for prophetic inspiration, to take refuge in the papal church as the only ark of safety. Such retrogressive reformers will find their exhortations have very little power over enlightened minds, till by some process or other the history of the last eighteen centuries can be blotted out. Men will persist in hoping that something better is in store for humanity than can be looked for in retracing our steps to the gloomy ages of papal supremacy. Such persons forget too that history never moves backward.

Another class of thinkers are equally confident that, as religious liberty is doubtless to be the future condition of religious society, and no two minds can ever be expected to view such a subject as religion in exactly the same manner, that diversity of religious sects, which has come in upon the world with Protestantism and religious liberty, is to be characteristic of all the ages of the future; and that the progress of the truth in the world is to be accomplished by such a conflict of opposing sects, as our fathers before us have witnessed, and we ourselves are witnessing; that by these antagonisms, sects are destined to be perpetually "learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Such men seem to suppose that human society is a scene of

perpetual progress with no destination, of perpetual activity and agitation with no achievement and no point of rest, a perpetual struggle and conflict for that which is never to be attained.

In the midst of this scene of chaotic opinion, the track of thought over which we have passed in the progress of this work seems to suggest one aspect of the subject, in respect to which even minds occupying positions at the opposite poles of the religious world may be agreed. The future of this world's history in respect to religion presents but a single alternative. I speak now only of the aspects which the subject presents to those who believe that Christianity is true, and that the church of Christ is to be perpetual. I have nothing now to say of the sickly dream of those who would have us believe that humanity has outgrown religion, that we have entered on a stage of human progress, in which enlightened men can no longer believe in a personal God, or in the continued existence of human personality after the extinction of the body, and that in the future of human history there is to be no foundation for faith or devotion, or for any real recognition of moral obligation or accountability. Much learning in one limited field of human knowledge hath made such men mad. They have studied themselves into profound ignorance of what it is infinitely important to man to know,—ignorance of a science which underlies and comprehends all the science which they know,—ignorance of a science of a personal God and personal humanity. The subject of which I am treating lies wholly in that region of human thought where a personal reigning God is recognized, and religion is seen to be a permanent factor in human civilization. In that region of thought the permanency of Christianity and the Christian church is readily admitted.

Well-informed persons believing in the truth and divine origin of Christianity will have no difficulty in being agreed, that Jesus Christ founded a church universal. It is true, that neither he nor the apostles seem to have used the phrase "Holy Catholic Church"; but those words seem admirably fitted to express what Jesus had in his mind, when he said, "on this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The idea of the *catholic* church was his own, and not an invention of after-times. Of the sort of catholicity which he intended, there are two and only two possible conceptions. One of these conceptions is that of an organic and official catholicity under the government of a succession of bishops, beginning with the apostles and extending to the consummation of all things. It seems to me that no well-informed man will deny, that this conception of catholicity is of very early origin in the Christian church; for example, that it existed in the mind of Cyprian who suffered martyrdom in 258 A. D.

The other conception of catholicity is purely inorganic, of a universal fraternity the uniting bond of which is the consciousness of a common faith, common principles, a common aim and a common hope. This church universal is made visible to the world, and its boundaries are defined to its own members, by the badges of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and by that faith and those principles which have been handed down to us by the testimony of the "twelve apostles of the Lamb." This Holy Catholic Church has no priesthood but that of the one High-Priest who is passed into the heavens. It has no head, except the one Head the Christ who ever sitteth on the right hand of God. It is a kingdom of God, not of this world. It has no administration, no legislative, executive or judicial

officials among men. Jesus Christ himself is its only ruler, lawgiver and judge. Membership in it is obtained only by being born of the Spirit, and can be conferred by no act or authority vested in human hands. All who are born of the Spirit are members of it in the eye of God, and by the gift of Jesus Christ himself are entitled to all its privileges.

No third conception of the catholicity of the church can be formed. We are under a necessity in forming our expectations of the future of christendom, of making our choice between these two conceptions. One of them must be true, both cannot be. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." They are diametrically opposed to each other. They are at the opposite poles of the moral universe. Whichever one of them is true, the other is false. Whichever one of them is Christian, the other is antichristian. Whichever one is of God, the other is a device of Satan. To one or the other of them the dominion of the future is appointed of God. When Cardinal Archbishop Manning asserts, (in substance, I have not his words before me,) that God only is the Head and Ruler of the church, Papists and Protestants unite in hearty assent. When he asserts that the pope who rules to-day at Rome is the official successor of the apostle Peter, and, in virtue of that succession, is entitled to the homage and obedience of the whole church of God under heaven, as God's vicerent on earth, he asserts what is either true and imperatively binding on the conscience of all christendom, or arrogantly and audaciously false, an impious attempt to exercise a hideous spiritual despotism over all the millions who are entitled to enjoy that moral and spiritual liberty wherewith Christ maketh his people free. The future destiny of christendom is either subjection to that priestly hierarchy over which the pope

assumes to rule in the name of God, or complete emancipation from all priestly mediation between God and man, except that of the one Mediator, and from all authority over the conscience except that of Christ and of God.

The whole history of christendom through all its centuries is a succession of manifested tendencies toward one of these systems or the other. Nothing is, or ever has been, at rest. These are the two poles of the moral universe, and everything is in motion toward one or the other. In our attempts to forecast the future of christendom, the problem to be solved, when reduced to its simplest possible statement, may be thus enunciated, viz., To determine what forces now operating in the religious world tend toward the papal church and the universal supremacy of the pope, and what forces toward that spiritual catholicity which alone finds any countenance in the New Testament; and which of these classes of forces is transient in its nature, and therefore destined to pass away; and which of them is permanent, and has the prospect of acquiring universal dominion. To solve this problem is to determine with certainty the constitution of the church of the future, and the character of that civilization which is to be the mature product of the influence of Christianity upon the world.

As all Christian history indicates the existence of these two conceptions of the church standing in diametric opposition to each other, so there are two attractive forces perpetually tending, the one toward one of these systems, and the other toward the other. On the one hand, the gospel of Christ, the doctrine which teaches the forgiveness of sins and the attainment of everlasting life through faith in Jesus Christ and such thorough reformation of life or repentance as that faith

is sure to produce, always has tended to bind all that embrace it into one universal spiritual fraternity, having no head but Christ, and no priesthood but the one High-Priest who has passed into the heavens, a kingdom of God which in the strictest sense is not of this world. Such certainly was that kingdom of heaven, on the glorious throne of which Jesus began to sit on the day of Pentecost, and under which the twelve apostles began to occupy their "twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Local societies everywhere sprung up according to the social necessities of each Christian community. These local societies were of necessity organic, but they were also independent. There was no centralized organization exercising any controlling authority over them. The kingdom of heaven was a constantly enlarging, inorganic fraternity, the existence of which was manifested to the world by the use of two very simple external rites instituted by Christ himself for the free use of all his followers, and by the doctrines which the Christians taught and the pure lives which they lived.

This is precisely the order of things towards which the preaching and the acceptance of evangelic doctrine tends. When the gospel is preached in single-hearted earnestness as on the day of Pentecost, and gladly received by multitudes, how vividly do all those converts feel that they are one in Christ! They are strongly impelled to unite together in permanent social relations, to help each other's faith, and to co-operate in the work of the Lord. That process by which they are separated by the lines of rival sects and under various systems of church government is not a natural arrangement. It does not grow out of the occasion. Left to themselves, it is one of the last things they would ever have thought of. It meets no want of which

they are conscious. They adopt it, because they feel a desire to be permanently associated with Christian people, and finding them divided among these various forms and governments, they are reduced to the necessity of choosing for themselves that form of organization which best suits their prejudices or their tastes. But from the beginning it was not so. No such necessity was experienced by the converts of the apostles. "All ye are brethren," expressed one of the deepest sentiments of their hearts, and that fraternity embraced the whole multitude of the disciples. It impelled to love and cherish them, to co-operate with them, but not to rule over them, or to be ruled over by them.

The instrumentality by which they had received the word, and been persuaded to accept it, was a fraternal and not a priestly function. It was just such an office as they feel themselves to be irresistibly impelled to perform for every other man, whenever God gives them the opportunity. It is the office of loving persuasion. Such a convert feels that by the gospel of Christ the way has been completely opened to every man into the very holy of holies, and that all the human aid which any man can need is the persuasion of a brother to arise and enter in. Of the priestly office there can be no more need, for Jesus has completely performed it. That this is the natural influence of the preaching of the gospel no observant man would for one moment think of denying. Every earnest evangelic preacher knows it by constant experience. Every true convert feels it. Every Protestant community admits that it is so, whenever, for the sake of the greater efficiency of evangelic effort, it consents for the time being to cover sectarian distinctions as much as possible from view, and endeavors to combine the whole Christian community, however ordinarily divided up by sect lines, in a

purely Christian effort to persuade men to be reconciled to God. The adherents of the papal church itself constantly admit the same thing, by the zealous efforts they never fail to make, to dissuade their followers from listening to any preaching which teaches men, that the forgiveness of sins can be obtained by repentance and faith in Christ. The preacher who teaches that doctrine as Peter taught it on the day of Pentecost, or as Wesley and Whitefield taught it in the eighteenth century, is undermining all the foundations of the papal church, though he never speaks a word against it. Of this the Romish priesthood are perfectly aware, and never spare any pains to deter all "good Catholics" from listening to such preaching, by all the ghostly terrors with which "the church" arms them.

So powerful is the tendency of all effort to propagate the gospel of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, to restore and build up that kingdom of God, that church universal which is delineated in the New Testament, that we sometimes witness a manifestation of that kingdom, dispelling for the moment the clouds and darkness and confusion of modern sect, and appearing in glory before our eyes, like the vision which the Seer of Patmos saw of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, adorned as a bride is adorned for her husband. With what fervid enthusiasm have millions of hearts been filled in reading of that ever-memorable communion season at the Madison Square Presbyterian Church, during the sessions of the Evangelical Alliance in the fall of 1873. In the joy inspired by that grand occasion, we could almost believe that the church had escaped at last from the wilderness, and crossed the Jordan into the promised land. But how momentary! It was only a glimpse of the "gate of the Celestial City" from the "Delectable

Mountains." Those great and good men of many communions, in the barbarous *patois* of modern sect, only a few hours afterwards left those high places of the universal church of God, to return to that wilderness of practical sectarianism, from which they had only for a brief hour escaped, there to struggle and toil in weakness and sorrow till God shall call them home. One thing only was wanting to have made that scene perfectly satisfactory to the longings of every devout soul. It was that on that holy mount of realized Christian brotherhood, they should have built a tabernacle for the whole church of God, into which she should enter and go no more out forever; that the oneness of the Christian brotherhood should hereafter be as completely realized in all the details of Christian work and practical beneficence, as in the holy fervors of that reunion of the dispersed tribes of Israel around the cross.¹ Such manifestations of the blessed oneness of the Christian brotherhood will not always be mere transient gleams of the spiritual kingdom of God, so soon swallowed up in surrounding darkness. They are true prophecies of the certain coming of the spiritual kingdom of God upon earth. They are precious foretastes of the glorious fruitage of the promised land, into which the Lord will ere long conduct his people.

It is equally obvious that there is pervading christendom another force which perpetually attracts men towards a priestly hierarchy, and an organic and official catholicity. It is the assumption which has widely prevailed in the Christian church for so many ages, that the external rites of Christianity can only be acceptably observed under the corporate control of the church, and by the ministration of a clergy duly qualified by

¹ New Englander, Vol. XXXIII. page 566.

ordination, or in brief it is the ecclesiastical interpretation of the power of the keys. Wherever this is accepted in however limited or modified a form, it draws towards universal priestly hierarchy. Not only in all the churches which vie with the papal church in prelatical pretension, but through all the sects of Protestantism, wherever any modification of this principle is recognized, we are able to trace a beaten highway leading towards Rome, as the most perfect existing embodiment of priestly hierarchy. A Congregational church for example rejects the idea of an official succession from the apostles. It began its existence by receiving baptism and the Lord's Supper from men on whom the hands of the bishop had never been laid, and without the slightest misgiving as to the propriety of so observing them. But in one particular the power of the keys was tenaciously retained. It is assumed that the church is very solemnly bound to guard by its corporate acts the external rites of Christianity from being profaned by the participation of unworthy persons. For this purpose what is called the discipline of the church is exercised. The church becomes a court, intrusted with the high function of judicially investigating all charges against the moral conduct of its members, and depriving them, if found guilty, by a judicial sentence, of participation in these rites. If this judicial power exists at all in the church, in no other way can it be so infelicitously constituted.

This conception of church discipline cannot be carried into execution with honest fidelity, without producing heart-burnings, alienations, disaffection, disgust. One of two consequences will inevitably follow. Either on the one hand all discipline of the church will be neglected, and the church will become seemingly indifferent to the moral character of its members, and its

moral reputation will deeply suffer, or on the other its life will be one of painful agitation and oft-recurring scenes of strife, which will make many of its members sick at heart, and ready to accept a church connection which affords a prospect of a more quiet and tranquil religious life. Such a prospect of tranquillity will seem to be presented to them by modes of organizing the church more hierarchal, and placing the power of the keys, not in the brotherhood, but in the hands of official persons by whom it will be exercised without any appeal to a popular assembly. Under such an organization there always has been and there always will be a powerful tendency towards more aristocratic and hierarchal constitutions of the judicial power. Congregationalists must abandon the exercise of such power, and rely on the moral forces of the gospel alone, or they cannot escape this tendency. They can guard the moral purity of their churches by the high moral power of the pulpit, and of the praying circle, and of the personal influence of their members over one another ; but if the power of the keys is to be retained as tenaciously in this as in any other organization, men will prefer some other mode of exercising it to the judicial action of a popular assembly. The moral forces which emanate from such preaching as that of the apostles will organize independent churches only ; but if the church is to act as a judicial tribunal, that is one of the last modes of organization which will be likely to command the united suffrages of the Christian world. The power of the keys if adhered to will prove fatal to the independence of modern times, as its introduction into the early church certainly did destroy the Congregational autonomy planted by the apostles.

The exercise of the power of the keys through the brotherhood can never be an acceptable arrangement

to those persons of wisdom and virtue who must be intrusted with the oversight of the church in order that it may accomplish its ends. If a judicial church discipline is to be exercised in this manner, these persons must exert a very important influence over it, and have a most difficult task to perform. They must guide the judgments and in a great degree form the opinions of the multitude, and control their passions. The task will not only be a difficult, but a very painful one, and they must often have the mortification of perceiving, that they have helped the brotherhood to do imperfectly and badly that which they could themselves have done much more wisely and with much less trouble; and they will become disgusted with a system of things under which such experiences are liable to be often repeated. They will look with longing toward some constitution of the church, which will not expose them in the discharge of the duties of their office, to be thwarted by popular ignorance and the ebullitions of popular passion. In this manner the power of the keys tends directly to disgust those who have the oversight of the church with all attempts to govern it by the voice of the people, and to throw their entire influence in favor of the origination and enlargement of clerical power. Its practical working will create a clergy, by showing that a clergy is indispensable to its successful exercise.

When thus a clergy has been once originated, it will constantly tend to the enlargement of its powers. The proof of this is abundant, both in early and in recent times. It is only necessary to refer to the history of the church to show that one change rapidly followed another, and that all changes were in the direction of an ever-growing priestly power; and there is no end to this process, till the last possible development of priestly

hierarchy has been attained. It is not enough to change the church of the apostles into the church of Hildebrand. That pope was more eager to grasp more power, and more successful in his efforts than any of his predecessors. Undoubtedly the papal church is the most complete development of priestly theocracy which has been attained in christendom. In the Eastern church that development was always obstructed by the presence of imperial power. But it has encountered no such hindrance in the West, since the fall of the Western Empire. Yet the effort for further aggrandizement has not yet expended its force. It was reserved for the last pontificate to formulate and proclaim, by the authority of an ecumenical council, the dogma of the pope's infallibility. Toward this last and most complete development of priestly hierarchy all clerical power under all the organizations of the Christian church is logically though not always consciously attracted, and the attraction is felt as truly under the most popular forms of polity, as under those that are more prelatical, provided only that the essential element of priestly ecclesiasticism is recognized.

Under all the forms of Protestantism, there are many, both among the clergy and the laity, who are not at all conscious of any such attraction toward the papal hierarchy. It excites in them no sentiment but disgust and aversion. Their sympathies are with a free church, as the logical result of a pure gospel, and they clearly perceive that the papal hierarchy, and all the forms of the church that are in close affinity with it, are contradictory to the spirit of the gospel. Whatever may happen they will never move a step towards Rome; for they know that Christ is not there. Yet they are ill at ease in the position they occupy. They are indistinctly conscious that all is not right, that there are

incongruities and unnatural antagonisms in the systems under which they live. They cannot advance in the direction of Rome, they dare not fall back upon the simple polity of the apostles. They have a vague apprehension that somehow the power of the keys must be exercised, the external rites of Christianity must be protected against profanation, by the exercise of ecclesiastical power, and assume that in some way they were so protected in the apostolic churches, though the apostles have entirely failed to inform us of the fact, or to point out any method by which the power of the church is to be exerted for this purpose. No observant man can have failed to notice this unrest of devout Protestant minds. They are powerfully solicited by opposing forces, neither of which they feel at liberty to obey. Divest them of their intense sympathy with that gospel which proposes to save men by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and they will take up their line of march toward Rome. Eliminate from their minds all idea of governing the church by ecclesiastical power, and they will stand in tranquillity and strength upon the platform of the apostles. These are the only points of rest. Nay, there is but one point of rest. The craving for ecclesiastical power knows no rest and permits none, any more than the love of money or the selfish greed of power. Rome is not at rest. She is ever grasping for some wider development of priestly hierarchy.

In a simple faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world, and in the government of the church only by the power of the word and Spirit of God, there is rest and strength. Whenever the church of God will consent to make a solemn pause, and a brave and earnest effort to understand the kingdom of heaven as Jesus founded it, and conform all her arrangements and her whole

social life to that standard, she will begin to know the peace of God which passeth knowledge, and to be strong in the Lord and the power of his might. Ministers of the gospel will be able to train their sons in all Christian learning without any fear that they will be drawn away by the seductive attractions of Rome. They will be working a system with which they are in hearty sympathy, and are prepared at all points earnestly to defend. How far this is from being at present true, they know best who have most deeply reflected on the passing scene. While I have been writing these pages, I have received a letter from an earnest Protestant minister, whose praise is in all the churches, in which he says, "I have often wondered how God can accomplish so much by a church that is off the track." A friend in the ministry has said to me, "I do not claim much for the church. I tell my friends that salvation is by Christ, and if they will consent to be for Christ, they can do nothing better as things are than join the church and co-operate with it as well as they can." If men will adopt that interpretation of the apostolic church which has been defended in these pages, they will have a church which will not be off the track, and for which they can claim much without any danger of failing to make good their claim.

What then is to be the church of the future? It surely will be either the last possible development of priestly hierarchy, the papal church with all its logical consequences, a perfected organic catholicity; or the church of the apostles, the church of which Jesus promised that Peter should be a corner-stone, and that the gates of hell should never prevail against it, the spiritual catholicity of faith and love. To which of these then does the empire of the future belong? To answer this question, we have only to consider which of the

forces which are now exerting their influence on the religious world is transient and temporary, and which is in its own nature everlasting. If the power of the keys as it has been understood in church history could be shown to be a sound and valid interpretation of the words which our Lord addressed to Peter, if it could be shown that by the very institution of the Lord's Supper, and according to the clearly expressed intention of the Master, the church was intrusted with the perpetual keeping of that rite, to guard it against profanation by the participation of unworthy persons, if it could be made plain that that rite can only be exhibited to the people by a clergy qualified for the performance of that function by the laying on of the bishop's hands, if the testimony of the apostles which has come down to us showed that these things are true, or that any one of them is true, then I would relinquish the controversy without another struggle, and, however reluctantly, admit that the extremest development of the papal hierarchy is to be the church of the future.

Or if it could be shown that, though these things cannot be exactly proved by the extant testimony of the apostles, yet if it could be shown that the relation of the centuries immediately following the apostolic age to that age was such, that it could be reasonably inferred from the existence of certain constitutions and customs in those centuries, that the same must have existed in the apostolic age, then also I would admit that the preponderance of argument was in favor of priestly hierarchy, and that its extremest logical development is likely to be the prevailing form of the church in coming ages. But none of these things can be shown. The ecclesiastical interpretation of our Lord's words to Peter is a transparent delusion, supported by no exegetical reasons whatever. One blushes that it has influ-

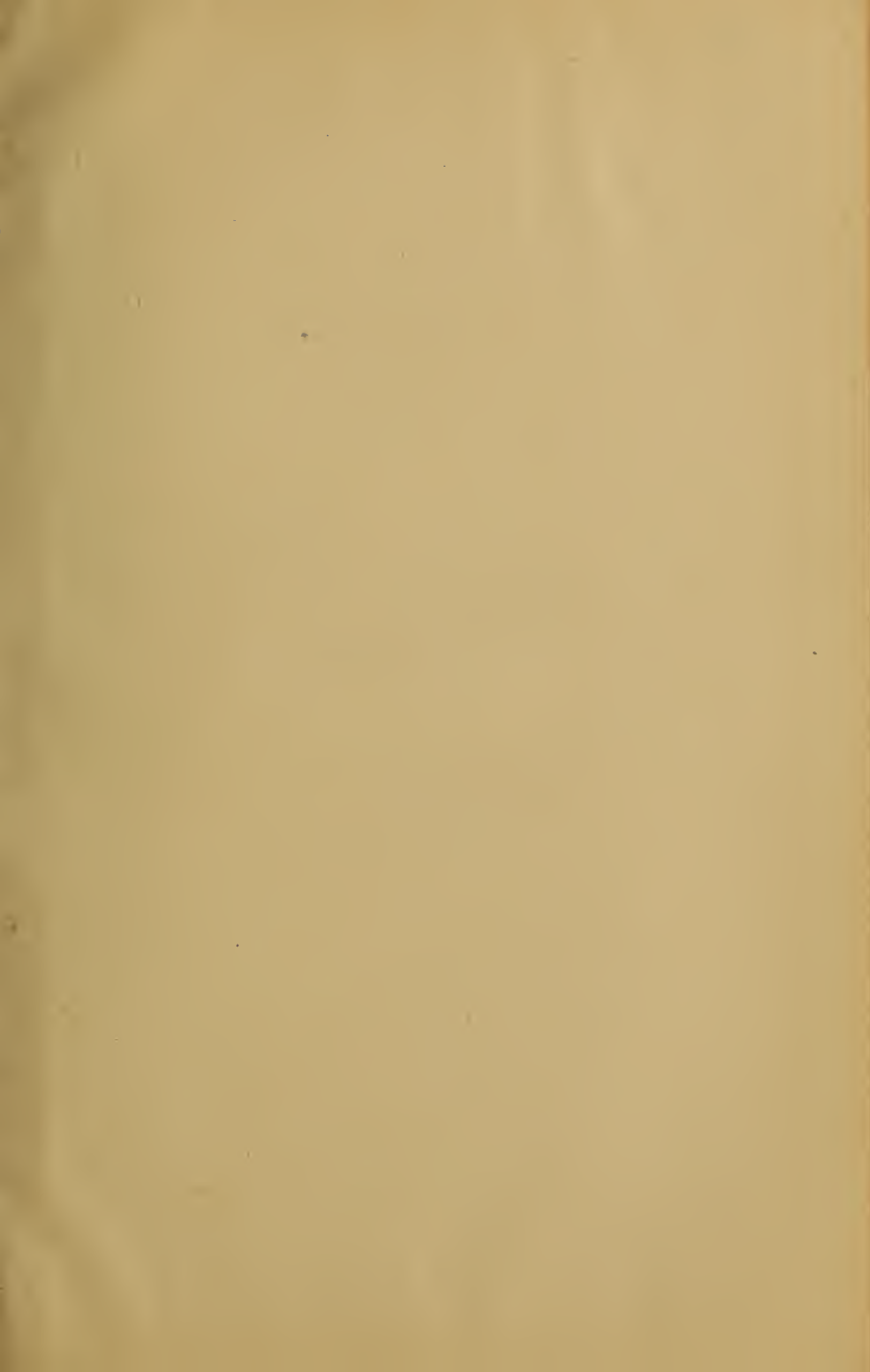
enced the church so long. The whole Biblical argument for the power of the keys is incapable of bearing its own weight, much more of sustaining the huge structure that is built upon it. The New Testament knows nothing at all of any necessity of a clerical or priestly function to the proper observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The inference that certain customs and constitutions which certainly did exist in the second and third centuries must have existed in the days of the apostles is utterly groundless and of no validity. There was every reason to expect that the progress of innovation would be rapid in the church as soon as the apostles were gone. It is as obvious that the church was greatly changed and corrupted between the times of Peter or Paul and the times of Tertullian and Cyprian, as it is that the Roman government and language were greatly changed and corrupted between the time of Cicero and that of Trajan.

Yet the papal church must be supported by the authority of Jesus and the testimony of the apostles, or rest on no basis at all. So must all hierarchal, priestly and prelatical pretension. When a candid, impartial and scholarly criticism shall be applied to all the extant historic documents of the first three centuries of the Christian era, it will certainly be found, that none of these high-sounding pretensions can derive the slightest countenance from the authority of Christ or the apostles. The question of their future is reduced simply to this, — Can they maintain themselves through the ages of the future without any such support? Devout Protestants will bring them to confront this state of the question without any possibility of escaping it, whenever they themselves will accept the polity of the New Testament as Jesus and the apostles left it. I shall soon pass away, and may not witness in the flesh the

fulfilment of this prediction ; but the time is very near when they will accept it, and when that time comes, confusion and dismay will pass over to the ranks of the legion advocates of hierarchal power. It cannot be perpetuated in an age of devout culture and sound historical criticism.

On the other hand, the spiritual catholicity which rests for its only basis on the doctrine of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, and that thorough reformation of life which it is sure to produce, will endure forever. It fears no historical criticism. The life, the moral character and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, his glorious superhuman insight of the profoundest moralities of human nature and of the universe, his original unique conception of the kingdom of heaven, and his divine foresight of its destiny in the world, all combine with the resistless proof of his resurrection from the dead, to give him a perpetually increasing influence over human society in its most cultivated ages. Faith in that Christ will produce reformation of moral character and purity of life. The multitudes who adopt it will become to a constantly increasing extent a world-wide fraternity, closely bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ, and impelled by that spirit of universal philanthropy which was the characteristic of his whole career, to imitate him in a never-ceasing endeavor to save all that are lost. This, THIS is to be THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE.

THE END.



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